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THE HAZELHURST MYSTERY



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THE
HAZELHURST MYSTERY

A Novel

BY
JESSIE SALE LLOYD

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THE HAZELHURST MYSTERY.

CHAPTER I.

TO BE, OR NOT TO BE?

KATE KERLEY sat with an open letter in her hand. She had read it through dispassionately—no tremor could have been seen upon her lips, no deeper shade upon her cheek, no softening in her dark eyes—yet she had just received her first offer of marriage, and was debating whether she should or should not accept it.

George Grafton had written her an open, manly letter, telling her of his love, and asking her to become his wife. She did not care for him one bit—of that she was quite aware, but the question was, how she should get the most enjoyment out

of her life—as a poor single woman, or a rich married one?

Kate had been left an orphan, at an age when girls most require a mother's guidance. A railway accident had deprived her of both her parents at once, and she was left to the tender mercies of a serious maiden great-aunt.

She was then but a tall girl of fifteen years old, with large wistful brown eyes, and nothing else particular to distinguish her except the unusually firm expression of her mouth and square-cut chin, which made you feel the child would be powerful hereafter for good or evil.

Miss Maria Ansell (Kate's great-aunt) was a good woman in her way, but totally wanting in the milk of human kindness. She had lived hard as a poor gentlewoman, had the very narrowest experience and views of life, but a keen sense of duty. Duty governed her existence—to duty, everything must be sacrificed—yes, even *she* herself! Difficult as she found it to make ends meet, and much as she disliked children, she must adopt her niece's daughter; the girl had no one else in the world, and it was *her duty*, and Miss Ansell sat more upright than ever with the

conscious pride of having put away temptation—the temptation of closing the doors of her cottage against Kate Kerley. Such a new element within its walls, Miss Ansell knew full well, would put her life out of time; and with a grim smile she determined to keep a “strict hand” over the girl. She had not forgotten how her niece had “disgraced” herself by running away with a penniless man, and why, forsooth? because she loved him!

Loved him, indeed! No respectable girl would give such a reason for “misconduct” so gross!

She really could not think what had come to the young women of the present day, they were ready to throw themselves at the head of the first man who asked them, and were always lounging about in attitudes that no modest girls would have adopted when she was young. Well she remembered going to see her niece after her marriage—it was her first and only visit.

She found her sitting before the fire in an easy-chair, and her husband beside her in another smoking! and she had—yes! actually she had her feet on the fender with her dress up in front several inches, showing her feet and ankles, with

her husband in the room ! And Miss Ansell shuddered in her maiden propriety as she remembered the indelicate scene, and how bold her niece had been over it, not seeming one bit ashamed. Miss Ansell had known too well what was due to herself ever to visit such a house again ; but now that judgment had overtaken the offender and the participator in her guilt, she felt it to be her Christian duty to offer a harbour of refuge to the child of her erring niece.

But, if she found she had inherited the evil of her mother's nature, she must put it down at once with example and discipline.

Kate Kerley had had a happy home during the early years of her life. Her parents had presumed to love and to marry, regardless of Aunt Ansell and all other opposing elements. So hardened were they in their iniquity, that the hour of repentance never came to them.

Mr. Kerley had worked hard as a City clerk, had generally managed to pay his way, but had found it impossible to save ; and they had died together. Had they lived, it would have been to learn of the smash of the house of business in which the husband was employed, and a City

panic such as had not been known for fifty years. They might all have lived on three straws a day, and died a lingering death, and sunk, God knows how low; but, as Miss Ansell said and believed, speedy judgment overtook them, and there was only one little waif and stray left to starve alone, and for her "Providence" had provided a refuge in the heart and home of her great-aunt, Miss Maria Ansell—a pious Christian, and enlightened woman!

Kate Kerley sat watching at the window for the return of her parents, looking with wistful eyes down the street. Anything might have been made of that child. They were the only beings on earth who loved her, and whom she loved, and her face was lit up with an eagerness and softness that made her look beautiful. How many long years it will be before anyone calls her beautiful again, however handsome they may think her! The child had a fire burning brightly in the grate, the kettle singing cheerily on the hob. Some crickets hopped about with their merry chirp. Everything within the room was neat and home-like, although it was only a London lodging at a guinea a week! The red curtains reflected the leaping flames and

cast a glow of warmth around. The tea-things had been spread on a neat white cloth by the loving little hands, and when everything was done, she seated herself at the window to watch.

It was a long vigil. At first she took an interest in the passers-by, but, as the evening wore on and darkness drew in, she grew anxious, and at nine o'clock the landlady entered and seated herself without a word of permission.

"Well, Miss Kerley, this is a queer piece of work. What's become of your pa and ma?"

Kate, who had been too much absorbed to notice her entrance, here turned upon her two large frightened eyes.

"What do you want, Mrs. Smart?"

"Lor' bless the child, they've missed the train. You needn't take on like that. Your ma said they was agoing into the country somewhere." And, casting an approving eye round the room to note its neatness, Mrs. Smart discovered that Katey had had no tea—nothing since her dinner at one o'clock—and exclaimed: "Why, Miss Kerley, no wonder you look like a ghost! Not one bit have you put between your lips since middle day, nor yet one drop neither, I'll warrant.

And, bless the child! if you haven't let the kettle boil dry and burn its bottom out! Oh! how careless gals is. Well, it ain't no concern of mine—your pa will have to pay for it, in course—but I'd have you more careful in future, in cause you see he's backward with his rent, which shows he ain't in a thriving condition."

Kate's face flushed an angry red. "Say nothing against my father, Mrs. Smart," she cried, with an ominous tremble in her voice.

"Well, you've a temper of your own, Miss Kerley, certingly! but you're not over-wise to quarrel with your best friend, with five pounds owing for rent, and you deserted, as one might say, by your parents, for the Lord only knows whether they will come back or not!"

A trembling seized upon Katey's limbs. Her parents not come back—her parents desert her! It was with passion she trembled, and she turned her face, now set and pale, towards the landlady.

"Go! leave the room!" she cried, with a gesture of command that Mrs. Smart, middle-aged woman though she was, felt bound to obey in silence; but when alone, she gave way to her indignation.

"To be ordered about by a young minx like that! in one's own house, too! Well, to be sure, things were come to a queer time of day! If Mr. Kerley couldn't pay his rent, why, she would turn him out, bag and baggage! Oh dear! what a world it was, when honest folks were to be cheated under their own roofs, and then be ordered about by a brat of fifteen!"

And Mrs. Smart sat down to supper, and partook heartily of the sirloin of beef which Mr. and Mrs. Kerley had had for dinner the day before; and handed a dry crust of bread and a glass of water to the small servant-of-all-work, who had never had food enough in her miserable life to grow upon.

"There, girl, have your supper; and be quick, for them Kerleys may come home any time. I wonder what they're up to, that they should be out at this hour of the night, when all respectable folks is at their suppers or family prayers afore they goes to their lawful beds! But there's no being up to the ill ways of some people, and they'll have to walk if there's any more of these doings. Ten o'clock, and them not home, and all the things to clear away and wash up!"

The Kerleys had been the solitary bright spot in the life of this hard-worked drudge—they had treated her as a human being, and she had improved in her own estimate of herself under their kind words. Make a man or a woman feel utterly lost and worthless, and what pleasure has he or she, what heart, to become anything else? None whatever; but will drift on with indifference to the fact of their own depravity. On the other hand, teach a person that he is capable of good; that, like others, he has personal responsibility and a soul to be saved, and he will long to become something higher, better. The motto of every human heart, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged, is "Excelsior," though it may become deadened by sin to the knowledge; as a man may become drunk, who yet has a mind, and while drunk cannot feel the degradation of his position.

To this poor little undersized drudge Mrs. Kerley's oft-spoken words of kindness were the first breaks in the dark clouds—the first blue patches in the sky; and she began to see there was something better in life than hard words, cross looks, the pocketing of stray pennies, telling lies to

shield herself, and making the eatables pay toll on the road. Susan would not now have shared that sirloin with Mrs. Smart even if she had been invited to do so; and when she heard of the possibility of the Kerleys being made to walk, she felt as she had never felt before.

Brought up in the workhouse, Susan had been sent to service when a mere child—had been beaten, scolded, starved—hardened—it was years since she had cried, but human sympathy had at last come to her; and if she was dry-eyed, there were tears in her voice and a lump in her throat as she pleaded for the lodgers with her mistress.

“Oh, please, mum, don’t go for to turn them out, they *is* so kind to me.”

It was not an argument in their favour to Mrs. Smart, but it was the strongest one on earth to the poor girl; and now the real tears began to flow, and Susan had a “good cry,” which gave her relief, though it got her a scolding from her mistress.

“Bless the fool!” cried Mrs. Smart. “What have you to howl about, I should like to know. Haven’t you got a good place, a good missus, and good victuals? What more can any gal want, I should like to know! Lor’! there’s a ring at the bell. Mr. and Mrs. Kerley at this hour of the

night, I'll warrant. I only hope they're sober! but they needn't ring the house down, they needn't."

Susan presently ran back into the room with an orange-coloured envelope in her hand, with a pale frightened face.

"Oh! missus, here's the telegraph come by a boy! something's 'appened, I know it has."

How many wiser people feel sick at heart at the sight of a telegraph-boy entering their gates—have had cause to feel so from past sorrowful experience. Can they not understand the feelings of this girl who had never handled one of these mysterious messages before—to her doubly mysterious and inexplicable—something "uncanny," in fact. She knew the message ran ever so quick all along the wires—from ever so far off—all in a minute; but whether it was delivered at their end (written on pink paper and enclosed in a yellow envelope) by one of the posts to the boy who brought it round, was still a puzzle to her, and the whole affair a terror. She watched with trembling, nervously clasping hands while Mrs. Smart read the message aloud:

"To Mrs. Smart, 161, Staples Terrace. From the Station Master, Worham.—Terrible accident.

Gentleman and lady killed. Supposed to be Mr. and Mrs. Kerley from letters in their pockets bearing your name and address. Please communicate with relations."

"Well now," exclaimed Mrs. Smart, "this is sad! and they owe me five pounds—dear, dear, dear!" and she raised her fat hands with a deploring gesture, and lifted her eyes to heaven. "Dear, dear, dear! only to think of the judgments that do fall on some people—it is just like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, a story as I'm very fond of, Susan."

Susan in the meantime had heard the news in a stupor. Her small mind required a long time to take in facts, and though she had heard the fatal words, they had not yet made themselves clear to her understanding.

"When are Mr. and Mrs. Kerley coming back, mum?" she asked.

"Why, never! Bless the gal! Do you think I'd 'ave two mangled corpses brought here? Who do you think would ever take the apartments after such a horrible tragedy had took place in them?"

It was dawning on Susan now.

“Is Mr. and Mrs. Kerley the mangled corpses, mum? Oh, poor Miss Kate, poor Miss Kate! what will become of her?”

Mrs. Smart was not of a forgiving disposition, and Kate had ordered her out of the room.

“Pride always comes before a fall,” she said, solemnly; “Miss Kerley’s has overtook her! What will become of her? What’s that to me? This is Toosday—her week’s up on Saturday, then she’ll go.”

“But where, mum?” asked Susan.

“Drat the gal! What a fool you are, how should I know? There’ll be things enough to sell to pay the rent, and whatever’s left of course she’ll ’ave. If she’s got any friends (which I doubt) she’ll go to them, or she’ll go to the union, or anywhere, it don’t matter to me, then perhaps she’ll learn not to turn honest folks out of their own room!” and Mrs. Smart arose in her righteous indignation to go and break the news to the poor orphan, who was watching with weary, aching eyes for the parents she should never see again in life.

Susan followed her mistress, and ventured to detain her by taking hold of her ample skirt.

"Missus," she whispered, "tell it gentle, for the love of God!"

And Mrs. Smart ascended on her mission of mercy! What should Susan know of God? Not much, certainly, but a few blessed words which Mrs. Kerley had told her—the most precious to her being, "God is love!" For his sake the girl pleaded with this woman for the child of her who had taught her this precious truth.

But the words meant nothing to Mrs. Smart; she had been a Christian woman all her life, and had no particular weakness for any especial texts like poor ignorant Susan, unless it might be a pleasure at hearing of the judgments that fell upon some who thought themselves better than their neighbours.

"Tut, tut," she cried, "who's been putting such talk into your head, gal, I should like to know? The love of God, indeed! a great deal the likes of you should know about it." And she roughly shook off the detaining hand.

Susan's heart misgave her as she watched the hard face go by and listened to the heavy determined tread of the landlady, and after a few moments' hesitation she followed stealthily.

Mrs. Kerley had told her it was wrong to listen at doors, and she had given it up, although it had been the chief amusement of her life—the one romance of her existence! But now surely God would know her motive, and forgive her! and she crept close to the partly closed door, and watched through the crack.

“Miss Kerley,” said the harsh voice she knew so well—“Miss Kerley, here’s a telegram to say that your pa and ma has met with a railway accident.”

Kate turned quickly, impatiently, upon finding Mrs. Smart in the room again, but when she had listened for a moment she became deadly pale.

“Where, where are they?” she gasped, supporting herself against the back of a chair, on which she leaned heavily.

“At Worham Station I suppose, that’s where the telegram’s come from.”

“I must go to them at once,” cried the girl; “I will hire an invalid carriage, and bring them home.”

“You must not bring them here, Miss Kerley; I’ll have no mangled corpses in my house I can assure you; and as for an invalid carriage, why

it won't make much difference to them now whether the springs are easy or whether there's none at all ; and if you'll take my advice you'll take care of your money and settle your debts, and pay for the funeral honest, instead of running about the country."

While she spoke heavy rings seemed to gather round Kate's eyes, and she looked at the woman with horror. She became livid, and her teeth were firmly set.

"Give me the telegram," she said calmly, in so altered a voice that it was not to be recognised for her own.

"You bear it well, I must say, Miss Kerley," said the landlady, handing her the paper.

Kate read it through silently, the only visible change in her face being the hardening lines about her mouth, and then she turned her eyes upon the other.

"Did I understand you rightly, that you refuse to allow my parents to be brought here?"

"You must not be offended, Miss Kerley, but it would ruin the apartments ; for if once lodgings gets a bad name they'll never let, I assure you. I don't know how you're left a regards

money matters, but I can tell you that your pa is in debt five pounds to me, so things couldn't have been very prosperous with him."

If Kate Kerley had been twenty instead of fifteen, and had known herself to be the possessor of a thousand a year, she could not have shown better command of herself, or more dignity.

"You shall be paid, Mrs. Smart; when is my time up with you?"

"Whenever you please, miss," answered the woman, who would have bullied the child had she given way, but shrunk like a coward under her scornful glance. "Whenever you please, miss, but the rooms was took on a Saturday."

"Then on Saturday I will leave," answered Kate.

Mrs. Smart hesitated. She wanted to say she must have a week's notice or a week's rent, but she turned coward beneath the gaze with which Miss Kerley was regarding her.

"Have you anything more to say, Mrs. Smart?"

"No, miss."

"Then go!" and this time the girl's attitude was still more commanding, the tone of her voice

more coldly imperious, and Mrs. Smart slunk away, but with revenge in her heart.

"You wait, Miss Kerley, and see if I don't make you pay for this. I didn't say anything about the week's rent, but you shall pay it, I can tell you."

When Kate had watched her enemy off the field, she sank down on the floor by the fire—by the fire which with loving thoughts she had kept bright for the dear parents who would never now come back to her. They were dead; how she wished that she were dead also, instead of being alone in the world. Do you, reader, realise what she felt? Have you ever found yourself *alone*?—your life one large desolation? If so, you can pity Kate Kerley as she sat with firm-set face and haggard eyes, gazing apparently at the fire, in reality at nothing. The worst of all forms of grief is silent, tearless grief. Tears bring soft thoughts to the mourner, but this cruel form of sorrow brings nothing but intense agony to mind and body, and tempts the sufferer to be very wicked indeed.

Bitterest feelings filled the heart of Kate Kerley. She had expended all the love of her

strong nature upon her father and mother. There was not another being in the world she cared ever to see again ; and now her parents were dead—cruelly killed in the prime of life—God had taken them from her, and she would never, never love Him again, never believe Him to be “a God of love,” but as cruel, cruel, as He was powerful ; and she clasped her hands in defiance and rebellion against her Maker till the nails cut into the delicate flesh of the London-reared girl, who had never run about in the sun and tanned them, or grimed them making “dirt pies,” or working in her own small garden. As she sat, Susan crept into the room and knelt beside her.

“Oh ! Miss Kate, I am so sorry. I loved them both as well as you, and they were the first as ever give me a kind word ; and oh ! Miss Kate, your dear ma used to tell me such lovely things about God. She told me never to forget that He loved me, and I never have forgot it,” and Susan’s honest tears fell thick and fast.

“He does not love *me*, at any rate,” cried Kate.

Susan looked at her. “Miss Kate, if you could only think of them, poor dears, and cry a bit, it would do you a world of good.”

Kate shook her head. "I shall never cry again, Susan ; I feel as if I had turned to stone. You mean kindly by coming to me, but let me be alone, I had rather be alone."

Poor little Susan, chilled and repulsed, crept away, and with her went the only love, the only sympathy likely, as she thought, to cross the girl's path for many a weary day. Kate never attempted to go to bed, but sat where Susan had left her, looking at the blackened ruin in the grate without the faintest interest—a good representation of the life, hope, and happiness that had been so bright such a short time since. The lights grew dim, flickered, died out, and she continued to gaze on through the darkness, hour after hour, till the day dawned—till the sun rose and shone mockingly into the window with the blind still drawn up, as when she watched the night before for her parents to come home. Susan entered the room and Kate started, and asked her the time.

"Eight o'clock."

It was time for her to go. Did Susan know where the station was for her to go to Worham? Susan, of course, didn't know at all, but would ask Mrs. Smart ; upon which Kate's eyes shot forth a

dangerous light, and she forbade the girl to do so. She could find out for herself, and she did ; made all needful inquiries, and sold a gold locket and bought a ticket to Worham with the money, and went straight to the station-master with the telegram in her hand—her face deadly pale. The loving expression of her eyes, which had been her greatest beauty, had changed to one painful to behold, especially in a girl so young. It told of agony, hatred, defiance, impotent fury—like a wounded animal brought to bay, a dangerous sort of animal too !

The station-master was kind to her, and told her the bodies of her father and mother were at the "Gray Horse," and the inquest would be held that day. But he thought the best thing she could do was to go and see Dr. Grafton, who had attended to all those injured in the accident, and had examined the bodies of her parents.

So Kate walked to the doctor's house and found him at home. He was going to the inquest, and she wanted to accompany him, but he would not hear of it. She passionately told him she would see the loved faces again, and he promised she should do so. He had sons and daughters of

his own, and looked upon the poor girl with affectionate sympathy and compassion.

“Miss Kerley,” he said, taking her hand in his, “will it pain you to talk to me and tell me where your nearest relations live, that I may communicate with them?”

“I have no relations, Dr. Grafton, and no friends,” she answered bitterly; “I must fight my own way as my parents did before me.”

“But, my dear young lady, you are too young and too handsome to be alone in the world.”

“Not at all,” interrupted Kate; “if you could recommend me to anyone as a nursery governess, I should thank you. If not I will serve in a shop.”

“But surely, Miss Kerley, your parents had friends who would be only too glad to receive you?”

“Dr. Grafton, my parents had not a friend in the world. They were poor, and committed the crime of marrying for love! Who, after such a fault, would stand by them, do you think?—not their relations, certainly. No; I have no friends, Dr. Grafton,” said Kate, bitterly. “I cannot expect to be treated better by the world than my parents were before me.”

"Miss Kerley," said the good old doctor, "I have a daughter about your age, and I should consider it ruin for her to be cast adrift on the world now. Forgive me, my dear child, but for her sake I must be your friend. I have a large household; one more or less can make no difference. You must remain here."

Tears stood in Kate's eyes as she answered him. "You are more than kind, Dr. Grafton, but it's impossible; you are a stranger to me, and I could not be a burthen on anyone. Indeed, indeed, I appreciate your kindness, though I cannot accept it," and she held out a death-cold hand to the man who wished to shield her from the world.

"If you will excuse me a minute; I shall not be long," said the doctor, and he left the room, returning soon after with a sweet, motherly-looking, white-haired woman, who went over at once to Kate, and kissed her.

"Miss Kerley, or shall I call you Kate, dear? my husband has told me all about it, and I cannot let you leave us to-day. No, don't make objections, unless there is anyone else you would rather go to."

"I have no one else," said Kate, humbly.

"Thank you for calling me Kate ; I will stay to-day, please !"

And she did stay that day, and many other days too. Dr. and Mrs. Grafton soon learnt the story of her life from her, such as there was to tell ; and the former went up to London and paid Mrs. Smart out of his own pocket, and brought down to Kate all the things that had belonged to her parents, so that she had no further pain or trouble in the matter. Mrs. Grafton went with her when she looked her last upon the dear dead faces, grieving for the tearless, yet passionate agony of the girl whom she had taken into her kindly heart, and would fain have seen grieve as the child she was ; then Mrs. Grafton took her by the hand and led her back to her own home, and she obeyed like one in a dream. She did whatever she was told to do, was perfectly tractable, put on the mourning prepared for her, attended the funeral, and continued perfectly listless, looking with her large earnest eyes into vacancy, doubtless picturing the world into which those dear to her had passed, probably longing to be with them.

A few days after the announcement of the accident in the papers, the rector of the parish

received a letter from Miss Ansell, begging for all particulars concerning the death of Mr. and Mrs. Kerley, stating that the latter was her niece. He wrote at once and told her all that he knew upon the subject, including the arrival of Kate at Worham, and her whereabouts. Upon which Miss Ansell of the flesh held a sharp conflict with her second self, who knew it to be her duty to offer a home to the orphan girl. Duty, as it always did with the good woman, got the upper hand, the flesh was ignominiously defeated, and Miss Ansell having overcome and slain temptation, sat on the extreme edge of her chair as upright as a poplar for the rest of the day, her nose turned heavenwards, her eyes fixed far above the erring mortals of this world who succumbed to temptation. How she thanked God she was not as others! Can there be a doubt that He accepted her gratitude? Certainly not. Miss Ansell, having decided to do her duty, wrote at once to Dr. Grafton, saying she would be ready to receive her great-niece the following week.

Dr. and Mrs. Grafton felt sorry that a relation had turned up to claim Kate, as they thought she had more chance of forgetting her sorrow among

young people than living alone with an old maiden grand-aunt, but Dr. Grafton made up his mind to pay Miss Ansell a visit, and went accordingly.

She was more on the edge of her chair than ever! She must have been fresh starched and ironed for the occasion, and well iced. The room was prim to a painful extent, the bell-pull cords were in holland covers, also the tassels of the window-blinds, the music-stool—the legs of the old-fashioned piano had on long holland trousers! Miss Ansell would not allow such a demonstrative thing as a piano to remain in her room with naked legs! No! Not for the world. She, a Christian woman, knew what was due to herself and to decency, and so the well-grown instrument, six feet high at least, was taught decorum! The seats of all the chairs were covered with holland, and the arms, a holland crumb-cloth was stretched over the carpet; the curtains, the carpet, the table-cloth, all were drab! Miss Ansell looked upon colours as of the world, worldly, and not fit for the use of a godly woman, so her cottage was innocent of such incentives to vanity and other evils. "Jeremy Taylor," "Daily Steps Heavenward," "How to Live," "The Lake of Fire," "The Judgments of Sinners," and a few

other choice books in the same style, were laid ostentatiously upon the drab table-cloth, and a heap of tracts upon a side-table, the top one bearing the enticing title of "The Shortest Road to Hell!"

Dr. Grafton took in these details one by one, and dreaded the effect of such surroundings upon the high-spirited, overwrought girl. Gentle treatment, cheerful society, and love might bring her round; what chance was there of any of the three here? He looked at the hard face and felt sure that there would be but little love, but little happiness for poor Kate in her new life. Gladly would he keep her if he could but arrange it with this only relation of poor Katie's.

"Dr. Grafton, I presume," and Miss Ansell rose up like a lamp-post, as tall, or nearly so, and almost as thin, as if she had been suddenly straightened by machinery.

The doctor, who was a small man, looked up at her with awe, and fell to wondering how a human body could be so totally without "ins and outs!" The semaphore raised an arm towards a chair some yards off, and he meekly seated himself. Miss Ansell continued in a sepulchral voice:

"You have come from Worham, I presume?"

"Yes, madam, I have."

"On the subject of my letter?"

"On the subject of your letter."

"You have, of course, informed Miss Kerley, my great-niece, that the Lord has raised up a friend for her in her affliction, even though her parents had gone astray?"

"Madam," interrupted the little doctor, "we must deal lightly with the dead; and if I am rightly informed, their error was their greatest blessing. Am I right, madam, in believing that their only sin against the world was loving and being poor?"

Miss Ansell looked him down with her cold gray eyes.

"You look at it like a worldling, sir—I from the standpoint of *duty*. Mr. Kerley's parents objected to the match, my brother and his wife objected to the match, and *I* objected to it and to him. After that they chose the downward path of disobedience, and they were married."

"Was there anything against Mr. Kerley?" asked Dr. Grafton.

"Yes, he was poor, and a City clerk—the son

of a *country doctor*!" added the old lady, spitefully.

"Dear, dear, I must have known little Katie's grandfather then when I was a boy!" and the good man smiled at the thrust Miss Ansell had made at his dignity.

"Madam," he continued, "the sins you speak of are in my sight virtues; but if you fear any taint may have descended upon the daughter of such parents, I can only say I love the girl, let her live with me."

Miss Ansell started as if she had been shot.

"Sir, the impropriety of such a suggestion; I really—really——"

He looked at her gravely, even sternly.

"The nicest people must have the nastiest ideas, Miss Ansell, if they can find the smallest impropriety in my suggestion. Mrs. Grafton and my six children have received and will gladly retain Miss Kerley as one of ourselves," and the little doctor looked almost as dignified as Miss Ansell herself.

"You mean well, sir, I have no doubt, but I hold to my opinion that there would be impropriety in Kate Kerley's living under the roof of

any man who is not a *blood relation*, and as I am her nearest living relative, I shall not permit it. I hope I know my duty, Dr. Grafton."

"And you consider that to be?" he inquired.

"To take up the cross that has been sent to me, and receive my great-niece."

The doctor sat silent for some time, and then said :

"Kate is a very high-spirited girl, much older than her age, with a large capacity for loving or hating. I should say you might lead her, Miss Ansell, but you will never drive her."

"I have not the least doubt, sir, that I shall be able to manage a girl of fifteen—that must now be her age. Rest assured she won't try rebellion twice in my house. I will do my duty by her, you may be certain."

Dr. Grafton rose with an impatient sigh.

"When do you require Miss Kerley's presence here, madam?"

"I mentioned next week in my letter."

"Yes, to be sure, but Kate really is not fit to travel at present."

"Well, sir, you can write and inform me when she is, and when I may expect her. There

are some tracts, Dr. Grafton, will you take one?"

"Thank you, no, madam; I have not any wish to learn a short cut to the lower regions; I remark the title!" and Dr. Grafton got himself safely out of the room without stopping to see the effect of his parting shot.

During Kate's stay at the Graftons, their eldest son, George, came from Ceylon. Having amassed a large fortune in the growth of coffee, he had returned home the happy possessor of forty thousand pounds, and fell straight away in love with the dark-eyed, grief-stricken young girl. George Grafton was of middle height, had about average talents, was moderately good-looking, had a manly square-shouldered figure, and hands that looked as if they had dared to work themselves even under a Ceylon sun; but one thing George had far above the common average, and that was his *heart*. He was as honest and true a man as ever walked the earth. If that could gain a girl's love, George's domestic life should have run smoothly; but if outward graces are the things that chain a girl's affections, then George Grafton had but a poor chance of Kate Kerley's love.

George blurted straight out from his honest heart to his father and mother the state of his feelings, and they heard him with mingled pleasure, sorrow, and amusement.

What parents can be glad to know that they are no longer first in the affections of a child they have reared with such love and care? Yet glad they felt that he should be happy, glad that poor forlorn Kate should have a protector in perspective. Of course she would love him! Who could resist such a fine fellow as George? The girl who got him for a husband would be fortunate indeed!

So thought Dr. and Mrs. Grafton of their first-born. But to him they spoke differently. They said they would be very pleased to have Kate Kerley as a daughter, but she was far too young at present for George to speak of love to. He might think of her as much as he pleased, but for three years he must hold his peace. Katie was not at all likely to find any other lover at her Aunt Maria's, so he might make himself quite happy about her.

And Katie bid good-bye to the friends who had been so kind to her in her trouble, and went to

Northley to her new home. Miss Ansell and she had not met before, and the girl's heart sank as she crossed the room; the good books still lay on the table, the tracts on the side-table, the top one pointing out the short cut to Hades as before, and Kate gave an involuntary shudder as she read the title, and thought life with her great-aunt must be the very shortest road there!

When she turned her head from the tracts, she saw her aunt had risen. The semaphore's arm was uplifted, and Kate was shaking hands with a skeleton, she thought. Everything superfluous Miss Ansell reckoned a sin, so she did with as little food as possible, and with as little flesh. She looked upon lovely women and rounded figures as the worst of all the deadly sins, traps to catch souls! baits to tempt the weak and foolish to perdition!

She turned Kate to the light, and examined her face. "One comfort is, you are not good-looking, Katherine."

Katherine! She had been called Kate or Katie all her life, and the formality struck with an extra chill on her ear, and yet she felt almost glad that the name so often pronounced in loving

tones by her mother's gentle voice should not be spoken by that harsh and cruel one.

"You are too late for lunch, so I hope you are not hungry," remarked Miss Ansell. "I dine at five o'clock!"

Kate had breakfasted at eight, and was blessed with a hearty appetite, and when she entered the house was very hungry indeed, but now she felt she did not care to eat; the hot, shut-up, close room, after the fresh March air, stifled her, and her heart had turned sick at the prospect of her future life.

"I—I am not hungry, thank you, aunt—Miss——If you please, what am I to call you?"

"My name is Miss Ansell, Katherine."

"Yes! I know; but I thought as you were mamma's aunt, I ought to call you *aunt*."

"I object to familiarity, Katherine."

"I understand you, Miss Ansell—you have received me out of charity," she cried, with flashing eyes, "not from love for my mother, as I supposed."

"I received you, Katherine Kerley," said Miss Ansell, sternly, "because it was my *duty*—solely."

Kate's teeth clenched very tight, her eyes

glittered with a dangerous light : " Had I known this before, Miss Ansell, I would have begged my bread before I would have burthened you with my presence—I hate you already ! "

" Have you read ' Jeremy Taylor ? ' " inquired Miss Ansell.

" No. "

" I thought not, " she continued, " you must do so : you will not find such language in ' Jeremy Taylor, ' I can assure you ; I was prepared to find you a trouble, Katherine, after the way you must have been brought up, with such examples always before your eyes as my niece and her husband. "

" Be silent, " screamed Kate, her voice trembling with passion. " Do you learn from ' Jeremy Taylor ' to slander the dead ? If so, it is a wicked, wicked book, and I won't read it. Say what you like to me, Miss Ansell, do what you like to me, I can bear it ; but never attempt to speak against my parents in my presence, or I shall be tempted to—— "

" Pray proceed, Miss Kerley !—if I choose in my own house to use my own tongue to express my own opinion upon my own niece, what will Miss Katherine Kerley be tempted to do ? "

"To kill you!" replied Kate, in a tone of suppressed passion, her whole face distorted.

"Hoighty toighty!" exclaimed Miss Ansell; "who taught you tragedy, Miss Kerley? or have you been reading 'Bow Bells?' We shall soon understand each other better, I have no doubt; I will answer for it in a month you will not dare to address me as you have just done. I cannot overlook it, but your punishment shall be light this time." She rose and took up the top tract: "Go to your room and read this through, and don't come down again until I send for you."

At the word "punishment," Kate's eyes had emitted a light—she was to be punished for standing up for her dead mother! She took the tract from Miss Ansell's hand, and looked at the title, and then said, "A month with you will take me straight to the Gate, you may be sure, by the shortest route," for which she received the soundest box on the ears that she had ever felt, and was taken by the shoulders and pushed outside the door.

"War to the knife!" cried Kate, walking straight to the small room which the servant had shown her as appointed for her use upon her

arrival. She sat down by the window and looked out—there was nothing to be seen to cheer her—a kitchen garden hemmed in by a very high wall, nothing else. Yes, there was the sky! how lovely it was! the fleecy white clouds sailing so peacefully over the azure surface, it soothed her to look at it—it did her good—it made her think of her parents, especially her mother—her blue-eyed mother, with her soft white face. And Katie softened even to regret for having spoken disrespectfully to her great-aunt. She knew that even for *her* sake that blue-eyed mother up there in the bright sky would be sorry to see her give way to violence and evil temper.

How well she remembered in the days now passed forever, when she was naughty—one tender look, one gentle rebuke, would quell the rising devil in her heart, and she felt that Miss Ansell and her cold contempt were to her like a red rag to a mad bull. At ten minutes to five Miss Ansell walked, without knocking, into the room. Kate, still gazing at the clouds with her head lying upon the sill of the open window, did not see her enter, and started at the harsh voice at her elbow.

"What, Miss Kerley, gazing up into the skies as they did in the Scriptures!"

"I was thinking of my mother," said Kate, softly; and then turning to her great-aunt, she went on: "I am sorry I was rude to you, Miss Ansell, it grieved mother even up there, I think," with a glance at the blue heavens.

"Don't talk romantic nonsense, Katherine. Your mother is dead! what should she know about it? *Do your duty as I have done mine*, and you won't find time for such fine sentiments, I can assure you; as to your sorrow, I shall judge of that by your future conduct; and now smooth your hair and come down to dinner."

And Miss Ansell stalked out of the room, and Katie came back from the clouds and from soft feelings to the stern realities of life.

When Sunday came round, Miss Ansell was, if possible, stiffer and more firm than ever.

Kate was waiting (according to orders) half an hour too early, dressed for church—her pale face in relief against her black dress, black hat, and long flowing dark hair, when Miss Ansell came in and looked at her.

"You don't look respectable, Miss Kerley," she said slowly.

Kate raised her eyes, but made no answer.

"Can you plait in three, Katherine?" she continued.

"Yes, Miss Ansell."

"Then go to your room and put up all that untidy mass of hair as quickly as you can, into the smallest compass possible. I should have thought you would have had the decency to have done it without being told."

Kate left the room without one word, and returned metamorphosed—the child seemed to have turned into a woman all at once—the large dark eyes looked larger and darker, and the brushed-back hair showed the intellectual brow—the chin and mouth seemed more than ever determined.

Kate re-entered the room as if nothing had happened. The turning up of a girl's hair is, as it were, a landmark in her life, and she had been hurried past it with unkindly haste. She had had no pleasant half hour before her glass to try what style suited her best, but had found putting up her hair a stern reality of life! it was to be done in the smallest possible compass.

If Miss Ansell had studied the question deeply, and had wished her niece to look her very best, she could have given no better advice, for Kate's was a small well-shaped head, and the close coils of unpretentious plaits took nothing from its classical beauty, and discovered the swan-like neck which had hitherto been hidden behind the curtain of her dark locks. On the whole Kate Kerley had no reason to regret her aunt's dislike to her "untidy mass of hair," in making her first appearance at Northley Church.

The service was a very prosy one, and Kate loved music—loved the painted glass, mellowing the light around her—loved everything that was beautiful, in fact wanted her senses appealed to by cross, candlesticks, and flowers.

At Northley Church there was nothing to fix her attention—a barn-shaped old building, white-washed inside throughout—a very tall pulpit of dark wood, with a sounding-board hanging overhead which looked made to fit down into the pulpit, and Kate kept thinking what fun it would be to shut the old parson up in it, and laughed aloud at the idea of the noise he would make to be let out! an old square box for a reading-desk, with

another smaller box for the clerk, who with deadly nasal twang gave out the hymns and did his other duties manfully.

What could Kate find to interest her in such a service, accustomed as she had been to St. Alban's and All Saints? But it was not long before she found that there was a great deal to amuse her. In front of her in a seat close to the pulpit, almost under it, sat a boy who was affected in his head. "Foolish Tom" they called him in the village, Tom had his wits and hadn't! he was not bad enough to shut up in an asylum, but he spoke a language only understood by his mother—a species of bellow and grimace expressing all he had to say. Tom never missed "saying his prayers" night and morning, but to whom they were addressed God only knows! Whether there was a glimmer of a higher life in the idiotic brain, it is impossible to say, or whether he was merely a creature of imitation. Tom always came to church and always sat in the same place, held a prayer-book invariably upside down, turned over the leaves when the parson did, sang in his own fashion, without any words or the faintest tune, and made a mumbling gurgling sound when the people re-

sponded. When there were only familiar faces in the church, Tom behaved himself fairly, but he could not resist the pleasure of surprising strangers; and Kate Kerley was not an exception to the rule. He began by making the most hideous grimaces at her, and the more manfully she endeavoured to withstand the temptation to laugh, the worse he became. She tried not to look at him—not to think of him; but it was a horrible fascination, and her eyes kept wandering back to him. This continued for some time, and he went through his usual catalogue of peculiarities, and then, not feeling satisfied with his success, he hit upon a new and brilliant plan. Tom took off his boots and put them upon the book-rail of the nearest pew, then his coat was removed. Kate was crimson with suppressed laughter and disgust, but unable to take her eyes off Tom. What would happen? she thought, when the droning voice of the parson ceased, and in its stead a sharp excited exclamation proceeded from the old pastor; "Jones, Jones! take Tom out of church!" Upon which the clerk slid out of his box and collared Tom, and essayed to remove him; but he was afraid of losing his property, which he had spread

out neatly all along the front pew of the church, and a fearful struggle ensued, in which Tom had decidedly the best of it, and the "honest sweat" stood upon, and dropped from the brow of poor old Jones—the clerk, beadle, sexton, pew-opener, town-crier, and general factotum of Northley. However, Tom, having secured every item of his belongings, one by one, at last went away like a lamb down the aisle, Mr. Jones holding on tightly behind, and as he passed Kate he gave her a final grimace worthy of Hengler's best clown!

"Let us pray," said the parson's droning voice as Tom's footsteps became faint in the distance, and Kate hid her face in her handkerchief, and gave way to soundless laughter; but Miss Ansell, who had never moved a muscle of her face during the whole scene, gave such a virtuous tug at the skirts of her dress that Kate heard the gathers crack! The clerk resumed his place, wiped his forehead on a red pocket-handkerchief with yellow spots, and showed signs of great exhaustion.

Mr. Cotter, the clergyman, was a teetotaler, and believed in water; on it he had flourished seventy-five years—so he told his parishioners—and you never saw him without a carafe and

tumbler by his side. On noticing Mr. Jones's fatigue he handed him down the tumbler filled with his favourite beverage, but the hot and tired clerk at first failed to notice the movement till recalled by Mr. Cotter, who said in a stage whisper, which was audible to the whole congregation: "Jones, drink some water, man!" He started up, and gulped some down at once, but Mr. Jones was not fond of water. Like "Meinherr van Dunk," he liked his brandy with as little water as possible, when the vicar was not in sight; and like the same renowned foreigner, Mr. Jones had never been drunk in his life!—so he said; but, as he plaintively remarked: "Digging graves all weathers was dreary work, and a sexton was a man who must keep his spirits up!"

Mr. Jones took up the responses, and the service proceeded quietly until the sermon began.

Mr. Cotter had been ill, and it was his first reappearance in public. He gave out his text upon the recovery of Hezekiah, and then looked round the church with a comical benignant smile.

"Well, my beloved flock," said Mr. Cotter, "you see the Lord has raised me up, and here I am again! You all thought I was going to die,

now didn't you? and I daresay that you were wondering who the new parson would be; and now I've disappointed you, my boys, and there's a kick left in old Jack Cotter still, I can tell you."

Kate's eyes opened very wide. Here was something new in the shape of a sermon, and she thought it was great fun, if only they had opened the church windows or doors; but it was so awfully hot and close, and the sun was pouring in at the diamond-paned window, casting its burning rays upon her till she began to wonder whether her dress would catch fire! and she had not been listening long, or rather trying to listen to the sermon, when her attention was aroused by a scuffling in a pew not far off. A woman had been unable to stand the heat of the sun, and had fainted, and several people were pulling her about—untying her bonnet strings, loosening her collar, &c. &c.

"Jones!" called out Mr. Cotter from the pulpit; "water—give her water!" and Mr. Jones again slid down, tumbler in hand, and doing, doubtless, as he would be done by, held the same meekly under her nose!

"Give her some to drink, you fool," called out

Mr. Cotter sharply. "Throw it over her!" Upon which, remembering her new Sunday bonnet, she recovered, and Mr. Cotter proceeded with a eulogium upon the effects of water, which elicited a broad grin from a boy called Jim Sharp, for which Mr. Cotter thought it necessary to reprove him. "I saw you laugh, Jim Sharp," he said; "you'll go to the devil as sure as I catch that bluebottle! By Jove, I've missed him—there's a chance for you yet, Jim."

There was a great deal of good in Mr. Cotter's sermon, and it was much more sublime than ridiculous. There is doubtless good in every sermon that ever was written or preached, but such is human nature that Kate failed to carry home with her any of it but the above quotation from the whole of his long discourse.

Miss Ansell, like any other Christian, dined at one on Sundays, so as to let her servant go to church in the afternoon and evening; but it is doubtful if she went, or if servants ever do go after the martyrdom and indigestion that most masters and mistresses go through to enable them to do so. If going without an egg in Lent for breakfast will get a soul out of purgatory, as has been

averred, surely those masters and mistresses will have crowns of glory for all they suffer after their early Sunday dinners! But Kate's healthy frame knew nothing of dyspepsia, and she had succeeded in eating a large slice of the raw-looking boiled leg of mutton without ill-effects. She was strong in mind and body, and was nothing daunted even by Miss Ansell's unpalatable dinners. This especial meal over, she followed her great-aunt solemnly into the drab and brown holland drawing-room, where the window was never opened, and was given "Jeremy Taylor" to read. For an hour poor Kate yawned over it behind the book, but never got beyond the first page. She kept beginning again and again, and finding there were no points to carry away, as it had been with Mr. Cotter's sermon.

At last Miss Ansell, having finished her tract, over which she had uttered many righteous groans, fixed her cold stern eyes, on her great-niece: "Katherine, come and say your collect, epistle, and gospel!"

"I—I—I didn't know you expected me—I haven't learnt them," she stammered.

"Say your hymn and Catechism, then."

"I haven't learnt any hymn!"

Miss Ansell looked unutterable things. "Katherine Kerley, did your mother spend Sunday as a heathen?"

Kate's eyes flashed, but she made no reply.

"Say your Catechism," went on Miss Ansell.

Now Kate never could say her Catechism; it was a mental defect, or perhaps it did not interest her, but she never said it perfectly in her life. The Nicene Creed was a Slough of Despond to her; "I desire," a maze from which she could find no exit. Her chief idea of the Commandments, and the one she never forgot, was the fifth, for she could, and did, heartily honour her father and mother. So when she was told to say her Catechism she coloured very red, and sat still.

"What! has not your mother taught it to you?" thundered her great-aunt.

"Yes," said Kate, "she did; but I've forgotten it."

"Katherine Kerley! you are stiff-necked; I don't believe any girl of your age can fail to know the Lord's Commandments; say them at once!"

First, second, third, fourth, fifth, so far Kate

got without a fault, scrambled on to the ninth and through it, but not correctly.

"The tenth?"

"I forget," said Kate; "what's it about, Miss Ansell? Oh! I know. Covetousness. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's *wife*, thou shalt not covet——"

"Stop!" cried Miss Ansell.

"It is *not* wrong," said Kate. "I know it quite well. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house——"

"Wrong!" said her aunt sternly. "I told you before it was wrong."

"Well, what is it, Miss Ansell?"

"The first clause ends with house, the second with wife."

"Then it's no business to be so," cried Kate. "The wife ought to be first; a man has no right to think more of his house than of his wife, and it ought to be altered," and Kate sat down with a determination to do no more.

"Katherine!" proceeded Miss Ansell, "it seems to me you are both ignorant and impudent; the latter is doubtless the consequence of the former, and I shall make it my serious and solemn duty to

teach you better. Explain to me what you read out of 'Jeremy Taylor' this afternoon."

"I can't; I don't think I read it at all. I certainly didn't understand any of it!"

Miss Ansell groaned.

"I knew you would be a heavy cross, Miss Kerley, but I never expected you to be as bad as you are. Most people have some redeeming point, even your mother——"

"Miss Ansell!" cried Kate, bounding from her chair, "leave my mother at peace in her grave; if you regret your charity to me I will go back to Dr. Grafton."

"He that putteth his hand to the plough and turneth back——'" said Miss Ansell solemnly; but the arrival of the teatray broke the text in halves; and Kate consoled herself for the loss of the rest with a plentiful supply of bread and butter—while her aunt watched it disappear with dismay, and made a mental calculation of what an extra quartern loaf at sevenpence a day would add up to out of her slender yearly income. After tea she got a pen and ink and wrote some time in silence. "Katherine," she said, raising the written paper, "after the life you have led you must have rules

and regulations to attend to for each hour of the six days of the week, and others for the seventh. I have written them for you and expect you to act up to them."

Kate had thought her mother's sweet unobtrusive religion beautiful; but the Pharisaical life of her great-aunt, with the tithes of even her nail-parings and orange rinds, disgusted her beyond measure; with her duty standard always set up to measure her neighbours by, and her tongue sharpened to condemn the erring—if this were religion, Kate hoped fervently that she should never be religious.

And so her life went on for three long years.

She studied with her aunt, who was a well-informed old woman. The amount of scripture history that was crammed into Kate's small cranium was wonderful; but all things must come to an end. So did Kate's lessons, and she was promoted to be a Sunday-school teacher and a district visitor!

Strange to say, with all her irreligion, Kate took pleasure in both these occupations, and fulfilled them well; and some of the hard lines would go from her face when the little ones of her class brought their Sunday offerings of flowers from their

own especial gardens. Rain over head, wet under foot, nothing kept Kate from the school, nor from the cottages ; and now she sat in her own room, looking out of her window, reading her first love-letter ! As usual, her face softened under its gentle influence as she gazed at the sky, and she felt she did not love George Grafton as her mother had loved her father ; and for five minutes she determined to say "No," to write at once and say so, and she left the window and sat down to her little desk and began "My," and then felt uncertain how to go on. If she were going to refuse him she couldn't put "My," at all, for he would not be hers. After all, why should she refuse him ? he was good, not ugly ; rich, he loved her ; and above all, he would deliver her out of the hands of Miss Ansell ! her life of poverty would be exchanged for one of plenty and happiness. Why should she not be happy with George Grafton ? He had the means of satisfying her smallest wish, her lightest whim ; and she would see the world and all the beautiful things it contained ; go to dances, have horses, carriages, and handsome dresses ; no more raw boiled mutton, but would be able to order all the things she liked best. Ah ! how she wished these good

things had come to her in the days when her father and mother had been alive. What joy to have given them handsome presents, just what she knew they required most! Now, Dr. and Mrs. Grafton would be her parents. Well, next to her own, she cared more for them than for anyone else in the world, even better than George, though she was now contemplating becoming "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh."

After awhile, Kate left the "My" and accepted the offer, without so much as consulting Miss Ansell.

The first that that good women knew upon the subject was the announcement of "Mr. George Grafton" by the astonished little maid-of-all-work, who had grown old in Miss Ansell's service, and was her right hand, or both her hands if that expresses more.

Kate was not prepared for this visit, and her flushed cheeks and downcast eyes might well make the happy man think himself beloved. Alas! poor George.

Miss Ansell was, of course, very angry with everybody; nothing could excuse Kate's deception and ingratitude, to say nothing of her immodesty,

in having accepted a young man she knew nothing of, without the advice and sanction of her natural protector. George was a most unprincipled young man, for tempting her to do wrong—at her age, too, a child, nothing but a child ; and, truth to tell, though Miss Ansell had never got really fond of Kate, she loved to bully her, and was aware that she should miss her.

Miss Ansell was getting old, and Kate did her needlework, kept her accounts, ran her errands, &c. &c. ; and though Miss Ansell still called her “her cross,” she was a very useful one indeed. But Miss Ansell knew the value of “loaves and fishes,” and was proud in all ways but one. If you offered Miss Ansell anything little worth having she would refuse it with very erect head ; but if it happened to be of value, she always found a “text” to bear her out in accepting it—and now she thought how blessed Kate would find it to repay her dear aunt for all her kindness and affection. Forty thousand pounds made George’s principles quite different in Miss Ansell’s eyes, and she forgave them both, giving them her blessing.

CHAPTER II.

"FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE."

NOT all her hopes of future benefits—not all George Grafton's entreaties—not all her Christian forgiveness could induce Miss Ansell to allow him to remain for the night under her roof. She never had allowed a man to sleep in her house, and never would; so after five o'clock dinner he had to take himself off home, so as to arrive at midnight—poor old George! His heart was light, and the miles flew by without his noticing the lapse of time and space, as he sat looking out into the darkening night, building his airy castles—the bower for his queen, the home for his young wife. It should be such a bright one! for his little Kate—little Kate of five feet eight—as tall as himself nearly; he was an inch taller perhaps, but she looked to have the advantage.

When he had got into the train the sun was shining on his love, on his thoughts, on his fancied home with its beauty of summer shade and winter warmth. How well he could picture the rooms,

the flowers and birds, and Kate there always, and perhaps as time wore on little faces upturned to his with rosy lips asking for kisses, little arms stretched out in welcome—Katie's children! all with her large dark eyes!

George awoke to the present with a shriek from the engine, as if some evil spirit mocked him! with cruel mockery of his rose-hued visions.

"Worham, Worham," called the sleepy station-master.

"Worham, Worham," echoed the still more sleepy porters.

"Good-night to you, Mr. George — any luggage?"

"No, thank you. Good-night;" and with hasty hopeful strides Mr. George Grafton turns towards his father's house, regardless of the cabman's pathetic "Cab, sir," as that disconsolate being discovers that after waiting with his jaded horse for the last train to come in, he has not got a fare, so he administers a cut to the poor brute to vent his temper, and a damnatory clause to the world in general, the travellers by last trains in particular, and gallops his wretched "gee" up a steep hill to

his stable, where he arrives with heaving flanks and painfully distended nostrils, and lies all night un-groomed in a cold sweat ! Poor horses ! Oh that the patient faithful creatures had better treatment ! Anyone who can ill-use a horse or a dog is worse than he who will injure his fellow-man. Watch the expression of a horse's eyes—a worn-out suffering horse—and say if the bitterest tears on a human face ever told such a tale ! Watch the dog who has just received a brutal kick from his master, and mark the agony of his feelings ; his eyes would tell of a suffering spirit, not merely of bodily pain. This is a word in favour of "dumb brutes." It is cowardly to hurt them, they dare not return the injury—few would, if they could—and they cannot tell you what they suffer.

George Grafton's marriage was fixed for the following August, only two months and he would be a Benedict ! which thought made him eager to prepare the home he had pictured for Kate.

At Hazelhurst, about twelve miles from London, he found a beautiful detached cottage ornée, standing in an old well-grown garden, very different from the new laurel-bound plots of the

present villa residences. Deodoras, mountain-ash, evergreen oaks, elder-trees in full bloom, bright double red hawthorn, and single white, "flourishing green bay trees," showing you that they are not a biblical fiction; guelder roses, laburnum, lilac, rhododendron in glorious pyramids, roses in standards, honeysuckle, clematis both purple and white, climbed everywhere, white noisette, banksia, Marshal Neys and Gloires clothed every wall and verandah!

This was a fit home for his wife, even George allowed, and set to work at once to furnish as he thought she would like it. Carpets of rich warm shades—none too bright—crimson or amber hangings of costliest materials to suit Kate's dark beauty; black and gold furniture for her drawing-room, oak for the dining-room, and walnut for the third sitting-room. The conservatory, which opened out of the drawing-room, was a glory of bloom, and George looked round well pleased at it all, and thought that Kate could not fail to be happy here.

With George Grafton's fortune he need no longer work, but after due deliberation he made up his mind that idleness was good for no man,

and especially for one of his age and active temperament; so he decided to go on with his business, the coffee trade, in the great city, which he could easily do from Hazelhurst.

Just before his marriage he ran against an old college chum whom he had not seen for years, the pleasure of the meeting was mutual, and George told him a hearty welcome would await him at Hazelhurst, and made him promise to come down.

Harry Cartland had been wild in his early days, but most young fellows sow their "wild oats" before they settle down into staid bachelors or Benedicts; and George had no qualms of conscience in bringing him into contact with his young wife. Harry Cartland, so far as intellect and appearance went, outshone his friend thoroughly, but he was of a selfish pleasure-loving disposition. If Cartland set his mind on anything, small or great, good or bad, he did it. Self-gratification was his law, and he acted well up to it. He was tall, over six feet in height, with a natural unstudied grace which never deserted him; olive-skinned, dark-haired, dark-eyed, with a heavy falling dark moustache hiding his mouth—had it been visible it

was a well-shaped though sensual mouth, with white square-cut teeth. The face, as a face, was perfect, undeniably handsome, and he was always well-dressed. He left college with George Grafton, and "saw life" in London for awhile, running through what small fortune he possessed. He was not burthened with relations, or good advisers. Harry Cartland was his own master, and in three years found it would be necessary for him to earn his own living, and having a friend, a London doctor, he made up his mind to be a medical man himself.

Want of brains was not one of Harry Cartland's faults, and he passed his examination creditably, and set up as a physician in the West End. He soon became "the fashion." He knew exactly how to please his lady patients, how to infuse into his voice tender sympathy, to touch them gently with his white well-formed hands; he knew even when to glitter the diamond ring upon his little finger, when to flash looks of interest from his handsome dark eyes, looks of pity, looks of congratulation, looks of *affection*. Ladies like their doctors to be kind, affectionate, and gentle, and Dr. Cartland knew the exact amount to administer

to each. He never overdosed them, never sent them away dissatisfied ; ladies' feelings were even more his study than medicine. He found sympathy a better tonic than quinine. But with all his tenderness of manner he was so far heart-whole ; if he made love at all it was to advance himself in his profession. He knew that Lady Henrietta de Courcy would tell Lady Jane Willoughby how charming he was, how clever, how kind, how sympathetic, and such a perfect gentleman ! and he was equally aware that Lady Jane would turn up before the week was out, and that she would tell her friend Mrs. de Jones Smith how miraculously he had cured her neuralgia ! and if he could do that he could do anything !

So Dr. Cartland prospered, and became a great man, and a rich one, and those who wished to consult him had to make an appointment at least a week beforehand. His patients were often kept a fortnight waiting for advice, but then, you know, "his time was not his own." He was so very busy—so much sought after !

August was not long in coming round, bright, warm, glowing August, and with it came Kate's wedding-day. Miss Ansell did her duty to her

great-niece to the last. Kate was married from her house. She even gave a wedding-breakfast, such as it was. The under-done mutton was exchanged for a sodden ham, an old cock was slaughtered for the festive occasion, a pie, with crust two inches thick, also graced the table, but no one ever ventured to look what was inside! Of buns, and tarts, and "fingers," there were enough for a charity-feast; apples, oranges, very pithy and juiceless in obedience to the season, and really nice fruit from the walled-in garden at the back of the house; and two decanters of Marsala! Had not Miss Ansell, indeed, done her duty?

Everybody at Northley went to see the wedding even "Silly Tom." The day was fine, but Kate saw with superstitious awe that they had to pass, by an open grave! She had wished for a quiet wedding, and she had it. Only members of the Grafton family were present at the breakfast, except George's best man, Dr. Cartland, and he was the life and soul of the breakfast. He laughed, told stories, made jokes, won golden opinions, and even flirted with Miss Ansell. Who could be offended with him? His manners were perfect, so

thought Laura Grafton, Kate's oldest bridesmaid, and so thought Kate herself. Are not all wedding-breakfasts too wearily alike to attempt to describe? There were, of course, speeches in which the health of everybody was drunk, and George Grafton, with new-born importance and dignity, returned thanks for himself and *his wife*. No single man, no older married man, can handle the word in the same way. Did anyone ever hear a man speak of his *wife* in the same tone after he brings her back from the honeymoon?

George took his bride through Switzerland. She did most of the sight-seeing on horseback—he walking by her side—and Kate was delighted. She had never been out of England before, and felt a thrill of ecstasy at the sight of Mont Blanc, at the Lake of Geneva, at all the blue mountains, and picturesque soft scenery, and at the end of a happy month they returned to England, and took possession of their pretty home.

And Kate had to confess that her husband's taste had been perfect in his choice of everything; even the victoria that stood at the station, waiting for her, with two shiny bays with black points, who were pawing the ground in their impatience to

carry Mrs. George Grafton home. But Katie, looking in her husband's face, knew still that she did not love him as she ought to do, though she believed she could be quite as happy as the passive agent in the verb to love, and was glad that she had married him.

They were not long settling down in their new home, and visitors poured in on Katie. Little as she had seen of society, she received them with natural grace and good-breeding.

Among the callers came Dr. Cartland, rather later than the rest, after his work, and George arrived from town before he had been there long, and kept him to dinner ; after which they spent the lovely September evening in the garden.

Kate, dressed in a pure white muslin, with a crimson rose at her breast, and another in the wealth of her dark hair, looked even lovelier than she had done on her bridal-day. So thought George, and in Dr. Cartland's eyes she was the only handsome woman he had ever seen in his life. As he looked at her, he was bound to acknowledge there was something wanting in her face ; and after awhile he found out what it was, not then, not

till long after ; but the face, as it was, fascinated him more than any had ever done before. He had seen prettier women, lovelier women, pink and white, creamy milky-faced women ; but what were they compared to Mrs. Grafton, with her wistful brown eyes, in which were such untold depths, unknown even to herself, her clear dark complexion, her perfect lissom figure ?

Dr. Cartland watched her with the painful knowledge gathering about his heart that he was, for the first time in his life, in love—in love with a girl he had seen but twice—in love with his friend's wife. Of course, as a man of honour, he was bound to keep away from Hazelhurst, and of course, as a man of the world, he didn't. Who ever knew a moth to fly away from a candle because it would singe his wings ? Who ever knew a selfish pleasure-seeking man forego the happiness of the moment for the good of the future ?

No ! Dr. Cartland smiled upon his patients till three o'clock ; then, his arduous duties over, he threw himself into his well-lined brougham, with one word only, "Hazelhurst." Not to make love to Mrs. Grafton, but to see her, touch her hand, inhale her beauty with every breath.

Had Harry Cartland spoken, or even looked love at Kate, it would have been her salvation ; but he did neither. He only loved her, none the less madly because he was silent. Had you asked him, or had he asked himself how he expected it all to end, he would have been unable to answer. But doubtless he lived in the present only, and trusted to the future to take care of itself. He had not once told himself that he could gain Kate's love, she was still his friend's wife to him ! But to be near her, with her, was necessary to him. So long as he was satisfied in this, he need not be dangerous, except perhaps to Kate's inner heart. He would not while thus satisfied seek any change.

Winter evenings saw the college friends smoking their pipes together, found Harry Cartland by Kate's side at the piano, spell-bound by the rich full tones of her voice. The love words of her songs sank into his heart, making mighty echoes that warned him to go while there was yet time, while the love he bore her was yet innocent, still unspoken. But he was deaf, deaf to everything but the wild pleading of his heart for love. Up to now he had never for one moment believed that she cared for *him* had indeed no reason for

thinking anything but the right and proper thought, that she loved her husband, George Grafton. But now with "*Si tu savais*" sounding in his ears, the unusual tremor in her voice subdued him, and there was a softness in her face, about her lips, that he had never seen before, the something that had been wanting was there now, and Kate was not only handsome, but beautiful. A lovely flush upon her cheeks, a new light in her eyes. What was it? Was it love? love for *him*! And Harry Cartland's pulses throbbed to madness.

He leant over her, touching her, "Kate, Kate!"

She raised her eyes to his. What answer did he read in them? They were filled with tears and love.

Yet on the brink of temptation, they were saved; for happy unconscious George came in, and Kate flew to him as to a harbour of refuge. She had only just found out her danger, but now it dawned upon her; what had made the happiness of the autumn and winter evenings? She knew she had been happy, but had not stopped to analyse her feelings, and now she had found the key to the mystery. It was not her love for her husband that had shed such brightness over her daily life, but for another.

She was more humble, more gentle, more painstaking to George, than she had ever been before, and he, poor fool, was happy, happy in his fools' paradise. And Harry Cartland was happy, wildly happy in the knowledge of her love, happier than if she had told him of it, for the tongue can be made to lie; but no one could doubt those trembling lips, those tearful speaking eyes. They told the secret that Kate would have wished to carry to her grave; but she felt that it was known to *one* now; and in her heart she knew that *she* had learnt one in return; and somehow, hard as she tried to shut this knowledge out, it asserted itself again and again, vibrating through her nerves with painful pleasure.

Kate coaxed her husband to get home half-an-hour earlier, so as to avoid the daily *tête-à-tête* with Harry Cartland, yet she loved him and he knew it, and knew herself beloved. She could not shut him out of her life, but she wished to be a good wife, and true to George. So, when Dr. Cartland's brougham left him at Hazelhurst, he found two friends to receive him instead of one, and perhaps he was not altogether sorry.

While a child only sucks the barley sugar, it

lasts a long time, "linked sweetness long drawn out;" but when he begins to eat it in good earnest, it is soon crunched away between his relentless little teeth. Does the child ever regret not having made his pleasure last as long as possible, or is the excitement of the "scrunching" and the remembrance of it preferable in his estimation? Dr. Cartland had taken one small bite and had found it delicious, but while the barley sugar remained in his mouth, he was content that it should melt ever so gently, so long as he lost none of its sweetness and flavour, and things went on as before, and summer came round again.

Kate had not quite such good spirits as of old; she was thinner and paler, and George's anxious eyes found it out. In vain she assured him that she was well—yes! and happy, but he was not satisfied, and went down to Dr. Cartland's house and consulted him about her.

Yes! Dr. Cartland had noticed the alteration in Mrs. Grafton which George spoke of—he would watch her more closely (could he?) and tell him his opinion to-morrow, and then George Grafton turned to his friend: "Harry! I hope I may *not* have to go away, but something has gone wrong

about the coffee, and I am really afraid I shall have to run over to Ceylon and see what they are up to; all my fortune is in the business, and I must, for Kate's sake, do the best I can. I am certain they are not growing it as we used to do, or the crop never could have failed as it has done this year."

Harry Cartland expressed his hope that his friend might be saved such a long journey, and that the next growth of coffee might prove better; and then George spoke again: "I should not mind leaving her so much, if she looked as well and as strong as she did a year ago, but she doesn't—if I go, Harry, you will see her constantly and watch her as carefully as if she were your own—you will promise," he continued, seeing Dr. Cartland hesitate.

"Of course, I shall be very happy to do so, Grafton," said the other; "and you may trust me to do all I can for her in your absence."

A keener observer than poor George would have noticed the increase of colour, the unusual agitation of his voice, the eagerness of his eyes.

"I shall be truly glad if you will."

"Very well," answered Dr. Cartland, with a sigh

of relief ; "I will promise to see her often and watch her closely, only you had better let her know it is your wish before you leave, or she might not like me to come."

"Never fear," laughed George Grafton ; "Kate is above such nonsense, and will always have a smile of welcome for my friend, you may be sure."

So George himself set the ball of his destiny rolling with his own hands—poor honest-hearted George, who thought no evil ! That day in the City decided that he must go to Ceylon or be a most serious loser, even perhaps a ruined man, inasmuch as the loss of money can bring ruin. The only chance of setting things going again, was the personal superintendence of one who was thoroughly interested and who understood the matter in all its branches. George was the man, and he must go even though he must needs leave his wife at home.

Poor George Grafton ! Does nothing warn you to let money, everything, go, only to remain by the side of the girl you have promised to love and to cherish ? When he returned home he did not find it an easy matter to break to Kate this

sudden and unexpected journey, and something in the unusual pallor of her cheek, and the sad wistful eyes made the task more painful, and when she advanced to meet him, with two small hands outstretched, all he could do was to take her willowy form in his arms, and hold her to his heart silently.

Something in his manner startled her, and freeing herself from his embrace she looked earnestly in his moved face.

“George,” she whispered, “what is it?”

All possible and impossible terrors crowded into her mind; had he heard those words “Kate, Kate,” which though spoken six months ago have vibrated ever since through her heart? Had she talked in her sleep of the fatal secret gnawing at her inmost soul? Had he seen her danger, and was he now going to warn her against it? In truth she hoped it might be so. She could not confess her unworthiness, but if he had guessed it and would help her against herself, how glad, how thankful she would be. She felt that he was a just man, and that he would help her if he knew, even though it broke his heart.

But when with emotion he said: “My own

Kate, I must leave you," she gazed at him white-lipped.

"Good God!" she cried out. "Why, what have you found out?"

The words might have conveyed a deeper meaning to a more suspicious man, but to George Grafton they meant nothing but what was said.

"I have found out, my wife, that I shall be a ruined man if I don't look after my own business ; and that my little Kate will have to give up her pretty home, her horses and carriages, and all the things that go to make the sweetness of her life, and will have to dress in cotton frocks, and cook her own dinners, and spoil those dear white hands ; and to prevent all this I must go myself to Ceylon, and put matters straight ; but oh my pet" (drawing her to him), "it is hard to part from you !"

"Don't go ! Oh George ! don't leave me, for Heaven's sake, don't !" and she clung to him with detaining arm.

"Katie, don't you know I would give anything on earth to stay, but I cannot make you a beggar, and must do my duty, my little Kate."

"Do your duty !" she cried, with flashing eyes, "that is what Miss Ansell would say. Don't you

say it, George. Don't; stay with *me*, that is your most sacred duty; let the money go—all of it, every penny. I will work, we will both work, and we will go away from here, and we will be happy," said Kate, looking gently and timidly at him. "We should be happy, George, should we not?" and she slipped her cold little hand into the large brown protecting one of her husband.

"My own brave darling!" he answered, love beaming from his bright true eyes. "You have made me very very happy, but I cannot accept such a sacrifice from you."

"Ah! you would not be happy in poverty with me," sighed Kate, turning from him wearily. "I thought you loved me, George!"

In another moment he had his arms about her, and was looking earnestly into the depths of her brown eyes.

"Kate," he cried, "it is impossible that you can doubt me, my one and only love! Did I not wait for three years patiently, with not even a smile from those dear eyes, to make you all my own, and now you say you thought I loved you! Oh Kate, Kate!"

She trembled as he spoke. George was not

great at making speeches. Even when he proposed to her it had been in a few words, but what he had said moved her and kept her silent, it was all so true; he had waited for her, loved her, heaped upon her every pleasant thing, and she!—she knew that two words from another man had had the power of reaching where all poor George's consistent kindness had failed to gain a heart's response.

"George!" she pleaded yet again, "don't go."

"Kate, I must!"

A light came into her face, and looking eagerly at him she placed her hand upon his arm.

"Then I will go with you."

"Indeed, it is impossible, Kate."

"George, I am afraid to be left," and the large eyes looked haunted.

"There is nothing to fear, Kitty," and he took her hand.

When he called her "Kitty" it was in his tenderest moods, but Kate turned from him almost coldly. "How do you know that there is nothing to fear? George, the day you leave me will be the last time you will ever see me in this world. I feel

—I know it.” And Katie’s features were drawn with agony as with blind eyes she faced her fate.

“Kate! my wife, you are ill, or you would never with your strong mind let such fancies run away with you. Thank God! here is Cartland! I see his carriage at the door!” and George Grafton hurried from the room.

A deadly sickness had come over her. Kate felt as if life were deserting her. She had pleaded with all her strength against her destiny, against herself, and it was all in vain, her husband had not understood her danger, and now she must face it alone; and, as if that were not agony enough, here was that other coming even now to torture her with such sweet bitter pain. Every word he uttered would echo in her heart, every look be mirrored back; and then there came a thought at first of relief succeeded by pain. Probably, when George was gone he would not come any more; she hoped he would not. Yes! she forced herself to say she hoped he would not; and then with a start she found he was by her side, looking at her with those large magnetic eyes that ever held her in their power. She tried to give them back a calm look, and then feebly burst into tears. Kate the tearless—

Kate the fearless—was shrinking and trembling beneath the passionate gaze of Dr. Cartland.

Much as he longed to clasp her to his heart, and dry her wet eyes with his impassioned lips, he commanded himself; not to spare her, but to make her more surely his own. Did he not feel that so long as Kate had her husband to fly to, she was not in his power; but with George Grafton safely out of the way, with the permission to come and see Kate whenever he chose, which poor foolish George had given him—he was as sure of his game as the deadliest marksman who ever lifted gun to shoulder. Indeed, Dr. Cartland could afford to be generous now, and calm poor Katie's fears.

"Mrs. Grafton, your husband has sent me to have a little talk with you. He came to me this morning to tell me that you are not feeling well!" and he drew a chair up just opposite to her, and looked in her face with the gentleness that had made his name as a lady's doctor. "I like to sit opposite my patients, Mrs. Grafton, and have a good look at them. You are my patient now, so you must submit to be looked at." As he saw the angry red flush her cheek and brow, and the trembling of the lower lip: "Tell me, child, what ails you."

As he spoke the tears rushed unbidden to her eyes.

"I don't know what ails me, Dr. Cartland, but I am ill," and more than ever the trembling lips worked with suppressed pain.

How nearly she threw herself at his feet and asked him to leave her, never to return, for the love of God! but then, with rosy red upon her cheek she grasped what acknowledgment that would be to him, and she tried to gather her scattered thoughts.

"As I said before, Dr. Cartland, I am ill, but I never asked my husband to send for you."

Dr. Cartland gave her a forgiving smile.

"I suppose, Mrs. Grafton, I ought to be offended with you, but," lowering his tone, and looking at her stedfastly, "there is nothing on earth I would not do for you; and whether you wish it or no I *will* be your friend! Give me your hand upon that bargain."

Her friend! She might still retain him without disloyalty to George, and her heart gave a wild bound of joy at this compromise between love and duty, and she stretched out an eager little hand to her tempter.

While they were so, clasped hand in hand, George Grafton entered the room. Were they not ratifying their friendship! and Kate turned to meet her husband with unfaltering eyes.

"See, George, Dr. Cartland and I are making a compact to be friends."

"Mrs. Grafton was not at first quite willing to let me be her friend in your absence, George, and was not best pleased with me for wishing to see her stronger; but I think at last she has consented to let me feel her pulse," taking her slender wrist into his hand, but looking at her husband. "A poor, weak, fluttering little pulse, George—feel it," and he passed the wrist into George's brown palm.

"There! that will do," cried Kate. "I hate doctors, or, at least, I hate being *doctored*," and she blushed as she remembered that there was at least one doctor whom she did not hate.

"How do you find her, Harry?" asked George.

"Weak and nervous; she must have a tonic."

"If George would only take me for a trip to Ceylon, it would do me more good than anything else," said Kate.

"I think not," answered Dr. Cartland. "You want quiet, rest, and care, not excitement."

"Exactly my idea," said George. "No, Katie, you shall not be sacrificed ; you shall be at peace in your own home, and I will fight the battle for you, and get back as soon as I can."

"What, going, Dr. Cartland, so early ? Well if you must, you must," and Kate held out a hand, kind, but not detaining, nor did George ask him to dinner that night, for he was so soon to be away from his wife that he wished for the intervening time to be spent alone with her.

"Good-bye, George ; come back soon, God bless you."

"God bless you, dear wife ; my heart is heavy at leaving you. Now the time has come for parting, all the pluck has gone out of me. Kate ! Kate ! my little Kate ! do you know how precious you are to me !" and he clasped his left arm tightly about her, while he held both her hands in his one right one. "Is it too late to come with me now, Kate ?" he asked, his hungry eyes feeding on her beauty, and trying to take enough into his heart to satisfy it during his absence.

"It is never too late," she cried joyfully. "Do you mean it? Will you take me?"

"Would you come even now, Kitty, with nothing ready?"

"Try me!" and she looked eagerly at him.

"No, no! I am a selfish brute even to wish it. I must not take you, darling!"

The light faded from her face, but she made no answer. Once more he held her to his heart, and something very like tears glistened in his moist blue eyes. Once more he pressed his lips to hers, the lips that would unite no more in life. Once more the hands were clasped, and yet again; and George was gone—Kate left alone. No! not alone! Had she not Dr. Cartland still? But the idea failed to comfort her.

CHAPTER III.

LAURA GRAFTON'S VISIT.

DR. CARTLAND was sitting in an easy-chair, smoking a first-rate cigar, and as he watched the white clouds of smoke ascend and disappear, a smile crossed his face. "So will vanish all clouds

from the blue sky of my love, and there will be nothing left but sunshine for my darling and me. Grafton has been gone a week to-day. I wonder if Kate has been dull? it will be as well that she should feel lonely till I come; but a week's loneliness will surely be enough to make her glad of a comforter. Katie! Ah! well, if the week has not been long to her it has been to me. I cannot wait any longer," and he rose and rang his bell and ordered his brougham.

Kate had been dull, had found the week a very long one. At first she hoped Dr. Cartland would not come; had then reproached him in her heart for staying away. Was this his friendship? She was weary of everything. What a blank life was without George! and then she buried her face in her hands with shame, for though she did miss her husband she knew that there was another step she had listened for each day of the seven since George had left, and that she wearied in the waiting with a sickening heart. She would not own to herself that she wanted him to come; but why didn't he? that was what troubled her, not his absence. Was he ill? if so, it was of course nothing to her, but oh! what a pain shot through

her heart, for which she could find no reason. She often felt a "stitch" now. She rose and looked at her face in the glass.

"How pale!" she exclaimed, "and George only gone a week; what shall I look like if he is away six months?"

Dr. Cartland had entered and had heard these words, and they did not please him.

"Such a devoted wife would certainly not exist through so long a period of desolation, I am sure, Mrs. Grafton. I have called to inquire how the tonic suits you," and he advanced and coldly shook her hand.

It was best so, much best; yet somehow this was not the sort of meeting Kate had expected with him. What had she expected? she had never pictured his greeting, and yet she had looked for more warmth, more colour. Kate could be cold too, so accepted Dr. Cartland's frigid hand with her finger-tips, and then sat down.

"The tonic! oh, you are very good, Dr. Cartland, but I had quite forgotten it."

"And do you intend to continue your forgetfulness?" he asked.

"Probably."

"And, in fact, as your medical man I am *dismissed*," he went on indignantly.

"I did not say so, but pray take it in that light if you like."

Then a silence, broken by Kate: "George has beautiful weather for his journey."

"Very fine, indeed," said Dr. Cartland, aloud. But in his heart he wished George was dead. What did Kate want to talk of him now for, and why was she so cold?

Another silence broken by him:

"It is a long time since I last saw you, Mrs. Grafton. What have you been doing with yourself? Have you been dull?"

"Dull!" she cried, with a quiver in her lip, "oh no! of course I have been as gay as a lark, as merry as a cricket, and all my friends have been so kind to me that I have not been left alone one day during the week—not once. What do you think of that, Dr. Cartland, now, haven't I kind friends?"

"If Mrs. Grafton has been alone at all it must have been from choice; of that I'm certain."

"But it has not been from choice, and you know it. No one has been near me, not even you"—stopping herself suddenly.

"Not even me?" said Dr. Cartland quietly.

"I did not say you," answered Kate pettishly.
"Why *should* you come?"

"Why, indeed; I am not wanted, am I?"

"But I have been dull, very dull," she went on, not appearing to hear him; "and I shall write and ask Laura Grafton to come and stay with me, she will at least be someone to speak to."

This was a shock to Dr. Cartland, but he would not show it.

"Will Miss Grafton stay long with you?"

"Oh! I really don't know," answered Kate, wearily; "very likely till George comes back."

With difficulty the doctor suppressed an oath; but recovering himself, he asked: "When will she come?" and then an idea shot across his brain—he would utilise her—and with a look of interest he remarked: "You must pardon me, Mrs. Grafton, if I seem curious, but I am a warm admirer of Miss Laura Grafton—we are great friends."

"Warm admirer—great friends," repeated Kate vacantly, with uncertain colour; "I—I did not know; George never told me."

"Now, won't you tell me when to come and see her, Mrs. Grafton?"

"Soon, next week ; whenever you like. You won't think me unkind, Dr. Cartland, if I ask you to go, but I don't feel well, I can't quite get over—George's going away."

She ended up the sentence with an effort, for the lie stuck in her throat.

"Take my tonic," said he kindly ; "if you will promise to do so I will run in to-morrow and see how it agrees with you."

He shook her cold hand gently, and left her without another word, and Kate sank down into her chair wearily.

"So he cares for Laura ; and I, fool that I was, thought he loved me. How much better so, how thankful I ought to be. Oh George ! George ! I am thankful to be spared temptation"—and yet she shed bitter tears, tears over the wicked forbidden love that was so sweet to her—"I shall get over it now that I know he loves another," she murmured, "I must write and get her here at once. It is much best so, and I can help him to be happy ; yes, I am glad," and Kate sat down to her davenport and wrote her invitation to her sister-in-law, asking her to come and stay a month. "He can say all he has to say in that time, I should fancy,"

she said to herself, with a sad smile ; " I am glad, but the flesh is weak ; perhaps I could not bear it much longer," and Kate put on her hat and took the letter to the post herself.

The next afternoon Dr. Cartland's brougham was again at Mrs. Grafton's door, as the neighbours remarked, and the owner stepped out, well-dressed, handsome as ever. Kate was lying on the sofa ; a smile flitted over her lips when he entered. Why should she be cold to him now ? her future brother-in-law.

" How is my patient to-day ? " he asked, her smile reflected on his face.

" Mrs. Grafton, you haven't taken the medicine ! "

" Yes, but I have," laughed Kate.

" Then it isn't the right sort, for indeed you are looking ill. "

" It was what *you* prescribed, at any rate, Dr. Cartland, "

" Yes, yes ! " he murmured half aloud ; " we must go on with it for the present, it will make things more sure by-and-by—poor Katie, I am sorry you suffer. "

" What are you talking about ? " she asked,

sharply. "I can understand plain English, but I can't understand that."

Dr. Cartland laughed. "I was thinking of a medicine I should like to give you, but I don't think the system is properly prepared for it yet. You shall have it by-and-by, and I shall see you with the old roses back again. Why don't you speak to me, Mrs. Grafton?"

"Dr. Cartland," she answered, "I know you well enough to claim the privilege of silence; talk to me and I will listen. Laura will be here to-morrow or the next day, and then you will have to amuse her."

"Shall I read to you then? I should like to amuse you, though you don't seem to think so."

"I should enjoy it so much," cried Kate. "It would be ever so much pleasanter than talking; there doesn't seem to be anything worth talking about now George has gone," and she sighed heavily.

"Yet," he answered, looking in her eyes, "I have seen you daily for twelve months, and we have never lacked conversation before. Why is it so?" and he held out his hand to her.

"I thought you were going to read," she said.

"It would be far better than asking me riddles which I cannot answer; ask yourself; you are older and wiser than I, Dr. Cartland."

"If I were to tell you my answer you would not like it, so I will look for a book."

He rose and walked to the table.

"*'The Idylls of the King,'* will you have that?" and without waiting for her answer, he sat down and read the sad and touching tale of the love of Launcelot and Guinevere.

Dr. Cartland read well and impressively, and what with the soft haunting tones of the man she loved, and the story of the unhappy Queen—so like her own—Kate's whole heart was carried away, tears coursed slowly down her cheeks, and weeping for Guinevere's woes, she wept for her own. Hungrily listening for Launcelot's passionate love, she felt the words which her love should speak to her.

Dr. Cartland paused—the passion of Launcelot had stirred his own. There lay his Guinevere, and in another moment he was on his knees beside her. His lips pressed in maddest wildness to hers which had so lately received George's last kiss—his arms about her light young form—his words of love

falling on the ears which had heard George's parting blessing only a little week since—a week and a day.

“Kate, Kate, my one love, forgive me—forgive me, darling!”

And for one short space she clung to him she loved with wildly clasped arms—only for a moment! She had had her heaven, now she must bear the remorse!

What! George's wife in the arms of another, with beating, guilty, throbbing heart, and that other the lover of George's sister? She had indeed fallen low!

With a bitter cry she started up, with burning cheek and fevered eyes.

“It was all that book,” she cried. “I was Guinevere, not myself; you were Launcelot, not yourself,” and springing to her feet she trampled the fallen book upon the ground.

“You shall never read to me again, Dr. Cartland, never. Go! go!”

Awakened thus rudely from his mad act, Cartland regained his feet. He saw it was no time to urge the excited girl—panic-stricken as she was by the violence of her own feelings—he took her hand.

"Forgive me, Kate, I have been mad ; but God knows I love you, in that I am not Launcelot, but my own wretched self!"

She trembled exceedingly.

"Go ! Dr. Cartland, go !" and she clung to the chair-back in which he had sat for support.

"One word first," he entreated. "You are not angry with me?"

"Oh ! go ! go !" she cried, and with a backward look of love he obeyed her, and Kate Grafton sank upon her knees and buried her face among the pillows of the sofa.

Oh that she could bury her shame !—and yet, oh God ! what bliss to feel his lips—to know he loved her—if only for that brief space ! If all the future belonged to Laura Grafton, that minute no one could take from her—when heart beat to heart—pulse to pulse, in passionate love.

So Kate, meaning to be penitent, found herself exultant. And, right or wrong, she had, for one glorious shameful moment, loved and been loved.

When Dr. Cartland's carriage stopped next day at Mrs. Grafton's, he learned that she had just gone out for a drive, and went away annoyed and disappointed. She loved him, that he could no-

longer doubt, with all the warmth of her passionate young heart ; the blood surged madly through his veins as he remembered her beauty, and felt in imagination again the pressure of her arms, as for one moment of ecstasy she clasped them around him.

“Why has she gone out to avoid me?” he said half aloud. “She cannot escape me. No! by Heaven she shall be mine. How I love the girl! My God! how I love her! I would sooner give up everything on earth than lose her. My lovely Kate.”

The next day he called again, and Mrs. Grafton was at home. This time the neighbours remarked that the brougham was dismissed without its master, and shook their heads in silence ; the time had not come to speak yet, but they took their notes so as to be well armed in case it ever should.

Already Miss Perkins (living opposite) had made several entries in her diary, with the spirit of retributive justice in her heart. If ever dates should be wanted against Mrs. Grafton, she Miss Perkins, would have them ready to hand. And why? Had Mrs. Grafton ever injured Miss Perkins? No! but she sinned against her sex by

being young and handsome, rich and well dressed, by having a husband and an admirer, while so many Miss Perkinses were left out in the cold!

But this time Miss Perkins's entry might have been omitted, for Laura Grafton was by Kate's side, and of the two a stranger would have said the former was the object of Dr. Cartland's attentions and that she received them with pleasure. They carried on nearly all the conversation, taking but little notice of Kate, who with downcast eyes and bent neck, was trying to work at some gossamer fabric, which would have become point-lace by-and-by, had she not ruined it utterly with her trembling fingers. This, then, was the man for whom she was on the broad road to ruin! But two days since and he had confessed his love for her in wild abandonment, and now, before her face, he was making "strong running" with her sister-in-law. Oh! if only she could have loved George like this! Poor George!

At last Laura turned to her a happy flushed face.

"Why! what a quiet mouse you are, Kate! One would hardly know you were in the room! What is the matter? Why, I do believe you are crying."

"Then you believe wrong, Laura," exclaimed Kate, throwing back her head. "But I am very tired of work! shall we go into the garden, the room is so hot?"

Dr. Cartland rose and looked at her, then came closer, and felt her pulse.

"Mrs. Grafton, you are ill to-night, you are more fit for bed than the garden. We have been selfish, and have overlooked you in our pleasant talk of old times."

Miss Grafton had taken up the work which Kate had dropped.

"Good gracious, Kate, how badly you do lace stitches, this will never be of any use, it's a perfect waste of time to go on with it; only look at it, Dr. Cartland, is it not a tangle?"

He took the work into his hand, it was quite enough to tell him what she had suffered, and he somehow forgot to put it down again. He longed to take Kate to his breast, and tell her his heart was all her own; but with Laura Grafton standing by, it was impossible. So he took his leave, but only to return again the next day.

Laura and Kate were sitting alone; they had been together three weeks, and yet another week

would elapse before they parted. Laura held in her hand a bonnet.

"Kate, your taste is better than mine, do tell me how to make this bonnet wearable with a mauve dress for the Horticultural to-morrow."

Mrs. Grafton looked up.

"Why, that bonnet's blue, Laura."

"I know it is, but don't people blend blue and mauve together now?"

"I daresay they do, but I couldn't lend a helping hand in such a combination;" and then, seeing a disappointed look cross Laura's face, she went on: "I shall not go to the flower show; you shall have my new bonnet—it is *écru*, and will go well with your dress."

"You are a dear. Oh, that is kind of you, Kate. You have good taste, and the bonnet's a perfect love. *Écru*! and Dr. Cartland said the other day it was his favourite colour, do you remember?"

Did she remember? Ay, that she did. Had she not gone off at once to her milliner and ordered an *écru* bonnet, so as to look her best; and had she not tried it on with conscious pride—seeing how well she looked in it before her glass

—a pride that Laura Grafton's could not reflect such a face? But though she had the bonnet, something forbade her to "hoist" another man's "colours;" and now the sacrifice was made, and Laura was going to dress to please his taste, not she.

"Do you remember?" repeated Miss Grafton, receiving no reply.

"Yes," answered Kate calmly, "that is why I offered it to you. There is no surer way to a man's approbation than remembering his tastes."

"Do you mean, Kate, that you think I want to please him?"

"I am sure you do," answered Kate, with the ghost of a smile.

"And do you think he cares for me?"

If a face could get whiter than white, Kate's did so, but she maintained her calmness. "To judge by appearances he likes you very much."

"But, you know what I mean, Kate—do you think he cares for me as George did for you? do you think he wants me for his wife?"

His wife! Poor Kate's heart stood still. She had never, even in the pictures she had drawn in her imagination, got so far as that. She knew

she could never be his wife. His love, his darling, was all she could be to him, and she had never once remembered another could be more. So she sat in a silent stupor, unable to give an answer to the question.

"Don't be reserved, Kate ; you have gone through it and I haven't. I never had an offer in my life. Do you think Dr. Cartland would have proposed if you had given him the opportunity ?"

"How should I know ?" she cried, in a tone of agony. "He shall have the opportunity, never fear, Laura. Good heavens ! how my head runs round ; do ring for some water."

"How selfish of me to be bothering you with my affairs, Kate," taking her hand and rubbing it. "Why, you are as cold as ice this hot day, and you are but the shadow of your old self, now I look at you closely. I must speak to Dr. Cartland about you, Kate."

"Dr. Cartland again," said Kate impatiently ; "are we never to hear any other name—never to see any other face ?"

"Why, I thought you were such friends," said Laura, with wide-open astonished eyes.

"Friends ? of course we are ; but one grows

tired of one's best friends if one has too much of them, you know."

Laura looked at her. "Kate, you look very ill."

"I am not ill; if George were only back I should be quite well."

"And you wouldn't get tired of him?" asked Laura, with a laugh.

"Never!" cried Kate, with such energy as to startle her sister-in-law. "Oh how I wish he were here!"

Kate had to go to the flower show after all. Dr. Cartland declined most positively to take an unmarried lady without a chaperon; but it was Laura who wore the *écru* bonnet, a fact which Dr. Cartland did not fail to notice, and "drew in his horns" accordingly. In five days more Laura would be gone: in the meantime he would only see her once again. There was already too much expectation in the young lady's eye. What did he care for her? Nothing, less than nothing. He talked to her to make Kate jealous; but he was perfectly determined not to get into any entanglement with her. If Kate were single, or a widow, he would make her his wife to-morrow; but there

was not another woman on earth besides her whom he would marry.

The flower show over, Dr. Cartland took the ladies to their door, and then bid them *Au revoir*.

The next afternoon Kate went for a drive, and left Laura at home to see the doctor, but he never came. This was repeated the following day with the same result. The third day, when Kate appeared in her hat, Miss Grafton said it was such a lovely afternoon she should enjoy a drive, and accompanied her, feeling very indignant at Dr. Cartland for her two dull blank afternoons. It so happened that he saw them, unobserved, and immediately drove over and called.

Upon their return they heard of their visitor, and Laura Grafton was dreadfully annoyed.

"How provoking to have missed him," she cried, "and there's only to-morrow left. Can't you do something for me, Kate? I'm sure he will speak if he only has the chance. Couldn't you just write him a line, you know, and ask him to dinner to-morrow? it's my last night, you see, and my only chance."

"I will write if you wish it, Laura; shall I say you want to see him?"

"Oh no, no! don't mention me; say you do."

"What," said Kate, with a melancholy attempt at a smile, "do you expect me to take your sins on my shoulders, when I have so many of my own?" But she got up at once and wrote. "There, Laura, will that answer your purpose?" and she handed the letter to her sister-in-law to read; it ran thus:

"MY DEAR DR. CARTLAND,—We were sorry to miss you this afternoon when you called, but hope you will join us at dinner to-morrow, and help us to spend Laura's last evening.

"Yours sincerely,

"KATE GRAFTON."

Kate watched her as she read it two or three times over, and wondered that she ever could have been attached to her—ever could have thought her a nice girl, and good-looking; she settled now that there was nothing in her—she was bad style, had no taste whatever in dress, and what brains and beauty she had, she had diligently made use of as a "man-trap" during the last month. If a man really loved a woman, would he require a whole month's "drawing on," and encouragement such as

Laura Grafton had bestowed daily on Dr. Cartland? Did she not know every trick of her face when in his presence, and did she not despise her for her endeavours to attract?

"Are you quite deaf, Kate? I have spoken to you three times."

"Why do things always happen thrice?" asked Kate, with a faint laugh. "There must be some magic in the number, I suppose; for I daresay you didn't raise your voice, and yet your third call aroused me, you see. You have not much to occupy your time, Laura; suppose you write a treatise on the mystic third time."

"When you've done talking nonsense perhaps you will answer my question," said Laura crossly.

"Let's see, what was it? Something about my infirmities, I think. Oh! you asked if I was deaf, did you not?" and without waiting for an answer, she continued: "No! my beloved sister-in-law, I fear I cannot plead that excuse for my inattention to your interesting remark. I am not deaf. I am only stupid," said Kate, in a bantering tone.

"How do you know my remark was interesting, if you did not hear it, you wise creature?"

"Because whatever falls from the lips of Laura

Grafton is bound to be so, of course! that was as neatly a turned compliment as you could have got out of Dr. Cartland himself, I think," turning upon her quizzical half-closed eyes.

"You are not in an agreeable mood, Kate: I asked you, and I believe you heard me, whether you could not press Dr. Cartland a little more to come—your letter might be an invitation to a stranger, instead of a man who is almost a brother to you," and Laura Grafton eyed Kate keenly, with no suspicion of her secret, but with wonder at the changeful colour and expression of her face.

It was some time before she received any answer—not till Kate had conquered in the struggle that had been going on in her heart. "Why should she help Laura to marry the man for love of whom she had lost self-respect and peace? Why should she invite him, that Laura should wring a proposal from him? If she thought it was for his happiness she would cut the heart out of her body; but was this for his happiness?" and then her conscience told her that anything that parted him from her must be for his good, and that battle was won. She raised a pleading almost humble face to her sister-in-law: "Indeed,

I will do my best to make things as you would wish them—don't be afraid, he will be sure to come ; but I could not press the matter further, I am sure George would not wish my letter altered."

"As you please," answered Laura coldly ; "only most married women are glad to give a helping hand to the single ones in their little love affairs, but you must do as you please, of course."

A look of pain crossed Kate's face—she knew the accusation was false and unfounded, but it pained her nevertheless. Might not Laura tell George that she had stood in her light, and he believe her, and George would not like his sister persistently hunting down her game as she had done during the past month, and it was with raised head Kate answered her sister-in-law. "Yes, Laura, I must do as I please in this matter, I cannot write more warmly to Dr. Cartland even to insure your getting him for a husband ; but I tell you he will come for all that !" and she arose with the air of a queen and rang the bell, which was quickly answered by a trim little parlour-maid : "Jane ! tell one of the men to take this to Dr. Cartland's, and wait for an answer," and as the door closed Kate took out her watch.

"It will be at least two hours before you know your fate, Laura ; would you care for a game at Badminton, or would you rather await the issue in your own room ? for this one is like the Black Hole of Calcutta, and we shall be suffocated if we remain here. We must set all the doors and windows open, and make a thorough draught if we are to breathe at all this evening ;" and, suiting the action to the word, she pulled up all the blinds and opened every place which would admit fresh air.

"What a whirlwind," cried Laura Grafton ; "I must do some of my packing, as I am going away the day after to-morrow !" She turned to Kate as she spoke, with a faint hope that even at this eleventh hour she might be asked to stay longer ; but Kate was stooping over some Gloire and General Jaqueminot roses in a vase, delicately smelling at them by turns to ascertain which was the most fragrant, and then, as if a sudden thought had seized her, she took one of each colour from the vase, and holding up the Gloire she said, with a heightened colour, and little nervous laugh :

"It is almost *écru* ! Will you wear *his* colours still, Laura, and I will mount the red ? George always said a red rose was the loveliest flower on

God's earth! Poor old George, I wonder how he is!"

Each girl put her rose into her breast, with a sort of party spirit.

"There!" cried Kate, "the Houses of York and Lancaster over again."

"Or, if you prefer a more peaceful simile, Kate, we represent the 'Two Roses,' but we shall be blown away if we remain here any longer;" and Laura made for her own room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO ROSES.

NO further plan was made between the two, but each held by her "colours," appeared in them at their *tête-à-tête* dinner, and resumed them next morning before breakfast; and now Laura's last evening had arrived, and she was already seated in the drawing-room dressed for dinner; the hand of the clock pointed to five minutes to seven, and the dinner-hour was seven o'clock. When she had entered the room, radiant in a blue silk dress trimmed with home-made point, cut into a very

low "square," displaying her ample figure, with necklace and bracelets of turquoise and gold, and a cluster of Gloires in the front of her dress, and another bunch in the crépéd masses of her light hair, Kate looked up.

"Five minutes to seven!" exclaimed Laura, "and you have not begun to dress! have you forgotten, Kate, that Dr. Cartland does not like waiting for his dinner? you know he told us so."

"I know he is always punctual; he will be here in four minutes and a half, and I shall not be ready till a quarter-past seven. Make the most of your time, Laura, a great deal may be said and done in a quarter of an hour, if you come to the point at once!" And Kate ran out of the room with a more cheerful laugh than Laura had heard for some time.

As the clock struck seven the door-bell rang, and in another half minute Dr. Cartland was announced. His dark eye took in the scene at a glance. He even understood the Gloire roses! and he seated himself as far as possible from Miss Grafton, after shaking hands with her.

"What did you think of the flower show,

Miss Grafton? you don't see such a galaxy of beauty at your country fêtes, I'll warrant."

"Life is very dull in the country, Dr. Cartland. What a draught there is here," getting up and pushing her small lounging chair closer to him, so that she might bring all the guns in her battery to bear upon him. "There, that is better!" and she looked up into his eyes, and did not quite understand the expression she read there; it meant, "I see your game, my lady, and am willing to receive your homage, you are a pretty girl, and you may worship me; but if you expect anything serious from me, you are mistaken;" and yet he threw a glance of admiration on her and said: "Much better!" with a quiet laugh.

The colour rose to her cheek at his reply, and she thought the proposal was coming; and she began hastily: "You know, Dr. Cartland, I don't care for the country, I should like my home to be in London," and she lifted her eyes again to his face.

"I should not like the country either; so you see our tastes agree, Miss Grafton!"

"You can't think what a dull life mine is, Dr. Cartland," she went on, her eyes still upturned to his.

"Then what must mine be?" he asked. "You have your father and mother, and no end of brothers and sisters, while I have no one!" and he gave an actual real sigh, not, as Laura supposed, for her, but for another, because he daily found life was a void without her.

"You dull!" cried Laura. "Oh Dr. Cartland! I cannot believe it. Everyone says how sought after you are, how much your patients respect you. You cannot be dull, gifted as you are, you know there is hardly a house in London where you would not be welcome."

"And do you think that is enough to satisfy a man?" he went on, more thinking aloud than speaking to her. "Is a man never to know anything dearer than the world? After all, my life is very blank indeed."

Surely this was coming to the point. Laura's heart fluttered with expectation. She must not rouse him from this sentimental mood. How dreamy and how handsome he looked; ten minutes past seven, only five minutes more, she must help him on.

"Blank! Oh Dr. Cartland! and you have so many to care for you. See how welcome you

always are here! Is not Kate ever glad to see you? am not I——?”

He awoke from his dream with a start. “Why, good gracious! what has become of Mrs. Grafton? it is nearly a quarter-past seven!” Then, after a pause: “You see, in your pleasant company, Miss Grafton, I had almost forgotten the time; but the voice of Nature will be heard, and I have arrived at the conclusion that I am very hungry.”

The door gently opened, and Kate entered the room.

“Better late than never, Mrs. Grafton,” said Dr. Cartland, rising with alacrity to shake hands.

“I am rather late, I own, but I am glad to see you not looking much the worse for the delay.”

“We were getting very impatient, were we not, Miss Grafton?” he said with a smile.

“If I am to tell the truth, Dr. Cartland, I think we were both very contented, and I don’t believe you even thought of the time at all until just before Kate entered the room,” with a triumphant look at her sister-in-law; and then she continued: “It was very naughty of you, Kate, to be late, knowing that Dr. Cartland likes punctuality, but” (shaking

her head) "you always are so long beautifying ; what makes you so, I can't think, for that muslin dress would not have taken me three minutes to put on."

"No !" said Mrs. Grafton, with bewitching good-humoured surprise. "Well ! you see it took me exactly twenty minutes, as I told you it would. I left the room at five minutes to seven, and appeared like fate inexorably at fifteen minutes past ! *voilà !*" and Kate made a little gesture, dismissing the subject, and accepted Dr. Cartland's right arm in obedience to the dinner-bell, while Laura Grafton took the left.

"A thorn between the two roses, Laura," said Kate, leaning forward so as to catch her sister-in-law's eye across Dr. Cartland's stalwart form.

Kate thought he held her hand unnecessarily tight against his arm, under the circumstances. As he had come to propose to Laura, why did he insult her by professing an affection he did not feel ? Had not Laura said, meaningly, how happy they had been without her, and he had smiled and not contradicted her ! She supposed they had settled it all, to their satisfaction. She had suffered bitterly during those twenty minutes, but had

been able to enter the room with a smile, and as she sat doing the honours of her table Dr. Cartland thought she was lovelier than ever, her eyes lit up by an unusual light, and a brilliant colour, born of excitement, upon her cheeks. Kate never had been so sparkling and witty before; her blood boiled—was at fever heat.

Dr. Cartland noted each symptom with inward satisfaction. Could she suffer so, unless she loved him with more than the ordinary love of women? That she was suffering he knew. She helped herself to the various dishes as they were handed round, but *he* saw that she merely dallied with them, eating none. He knew that the woman he worshipped was suffering. He sorrowed for her pain, yet exulted in it! Miss Grafton would be gone to-morrow, and then——

Kate looked at her sister-in-law and rose. "I am sorry, Dr. Cartland, we have no one to amuse you."

"What!" he exclaimed, "you surely don't expect me to remain here to be Tommy All-alone! I don't mean to drink any more wine. You can't be barbarous enough to desert me, Mrs. Grafton?"

Kate wanted him to remain behind. She

wished to find out if it were all settled ; if she had given Laura opportunities enough to "land her fish." She wanted to know the worst or the best, not being at that moment able to determine which was which. But anything would be better than the agony of uncertainty.

Laura Grafton, however, had no desire to lose sight of her game. She had "stalked" in steadily, and did not wish him to have an hour of reflection, sipping his wine in moody silence ; she merely wanted to take up the thread where it had got entangled before dinner, and wind it up to a satisfactory conclusion, so she gave Kate no time to answer.

"Yes, do come with us, Dr. Cartland, we shall be sure to quarrel if you don't, or go, to sleep talking of the weather, and not be able to rouse up again all the evening, or something dreadful will happen."

Dr. Cartland needed no further invitation, but followed the ladies at once. They selected their favourite chairs, and sat by the French window, the evening air fanning their cheeks. The conversation was general. Laura wondered how she could get rid of the objectionable third element. If only

the length the room were between them! then they could talk without being heard—in subdued tones.

“Oh Katie,” she cried, “do sing us something! You don’t want music and lights, like most people. One of those soft songs you often sing in the gloaming will be delicious!”

Kate, clad in white muslin, with crimson roses kissing her snowy neck, floated across the room in the waning light, and began Elaine’s song of “Love and Death.”

Sweet is true love though given in vain—in vain,
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain :
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

Love, art thou sweet ? then bitter death must be ;
Love, art thou bitter ? sweet is death to me ;
Oh love ! if death be sweeter—let me die.

Sweet love ! that seems not made to fade away ;
Sweet death ! that seems to make us loveless clay ;
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

I fain would follow love, if that could be,
I needs must follow death who calls for me ;
Call, and I follow. I follow. Let me die !

As the last notes died away, burning tears fell upon the keys of the piano. She had felt every word of it. How happy she could have

been had love been possible, how thankful she would be for death—death to release her from the bonds of wifhood to a man (good though he was) whom she could not love; to release her from the knowledge of the affection of the man whom she did love, body and soul, heart and life, for another, from her double shame, her double anguish!

“Let me die!” Kate’s voice sounded its agonised lament straight into Dr. Cartland’s heart, where it remained quivering painfully. Music had at all times great power over him, and these low faltering words and notes of Kate Grafton’s sunk deep. The tremulous earnestness told him such a tale of her sadness and her suffering that he was touched to the quick. His love, his Kate, wished for death; was weary now. But was it not in his power to make her wish for life again? His bright darling! What could she and grim death have to say to each other? she in her early bloom of girlish womanhood. No! she should not die, but live for him.

He would with his left arm shield her from the world, and with his right caress every care-mark from her brow. His beautiful Kate! Thus

his eager thoughts chased each other through his brain, while Laura Grafton whispered unheard in his ear.

She was sitting close to him, and he eagerly leaning forward, looking into a bright happy future with Kate, a smile of joy playing upon his lips. Anyone might have mistaken the two for happy lovers. Kate, her song of love and death ended, raised her head, and in the twilight saw it all. With a stifled wail she slid ghost-like from the room. Why should she be a restraint upon them? They were all in all to each other, she but a looker-on at their joy! She could not bear it yet; by-and-by perhaps she might see it unmoved, not now! She had skirted the garden, round by the shady trees and luxuriant shrubs, the magnolias, with their lamplike flowers, and having gained a bit of tanglewood all moss-grown under foot, she sank upon the earth, her pure white dress bedabbled with the evening dew.

"Oh my God!" she cried, "let me die!" and so upon her knees she prayed, "Let me die!" Forgetful of time and space, she lay there prone, a lovely broken flower, wrestling with her Maker for a boon which could not be granted—yet.

Dr. Cartland heard the wail of Kate's despair as she left the room, but her flight was lost in the tumult of his own feelings, and he was not aware of her absence. Laura continued her soft talk, and he sat by her absorbed in his own reflections, till aroused by her asking in a raised voice for another song from Kate, and then he became aware that there was no answer. Laura cared nothing for music, but it obliged her to talk in confidential tones, so she liked Kate to sing, but now that she was conscious of her absence, she felt even more glad. She had an open course; she must take the lead, and fly past the winning-post in triumph.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "dear old Kate, she has gone away. I like to see a woman do as she would be done by, don't you, Dr. Cartland? Now she knew that my last evening with you I should like to have you all to myself, and," laying her hand upon his arm, and looking with bright eyes into his face, "you know I do, do you not?"

Dr. Cartland saw the pretty, hopeful face very near his own but had no desire to possess it. He would, perhaps, at any other time have robbed

those red lips of a kiss, but to-night there was no room in his thoughts for her. Kate had gained such an ascendancy over him that his mind was full of her image, full and overflowing. At any other time Dr. Cartland would have enjoyed a flirtation with Laura Grafton, taking very good care, however, that no offer to make her his wife should pass his lips, but not to-night. All that was real in the man, all that was earnest, yes, and all that was good, had been called out to-night by his love for Kate. Had she been free to become his wife he would have been a better man for all his after-life; for his love for her was the one reality of his artificial existence. But Kate was not free; she was the wife of his friend. He knew it, but this knowledge had no power now to stop his determination. If she could not be his wife, she loved him, and should be his darling, his companion, the oasis of his life! With such thoughts it was no pleasure to him to "spoon" with Miss Grafton, and for once he put vanity aside.

"Laura," he said, "we have always been friends, and it is a pleasure for me to be with you. Don't think me impertinent, but, once or twice, I have thought, feared, that you gave me credit for a

warmer feeling. I never shall marry, Miss Grafton, unless great improbabilities happen."

Laura began to cry.

"Oh Dr. Cartland! I thought——" Then throwing up her fair head with an indignant gesture—"Never mind what I thought, but you certainly gave me to understand——" Then with a sigh—"Never mind, it's over now; but tell me one thing, did Kate know of these views of yours?"

"Certainly not. I have never spoken of my feelings to Mrs. Grafton."

"Then good-night," said Laura. "You will excuse me, Dr. Cartland, but I am going to my own room. I am just a little upset. I don't blame you, you know, but I mistook your friendship for something else. Good-bye, Dr. Cartland; think of me sometimes, and tell Kate when she comes back that I'm gone to bed. Don't let her come to me to-night," and Laura Grafton left the room, and rushed upstairs, shedding tears of rage and disappointment over her crushed hopes and fruitless endeavours.

Dr. Cartland waited impatiently for Kate's return; every moment seemed an hour. At last

he could bear the silence, the quietness, the inaction no longer, and stepped out into the night. One star looked him in the face, glittering brightly—that was Kate, the one bright spot, the one pure feeling of his heart. What could have become of her? He wandered on unconsciously, taking the path she had trod an hour before. He entered the tanglewood which Kate often laughingly called her “wilderness,” and stopped. What was that white and glimmering on the dark ground? His heart beat quickly, his breath came heavily, his instinct told him that it was Kate. But why, in God’s name, was she lying there so motionless? Was he too late?

“Let me die!” Her last words rang through his brain painfully. Was she dead? Had God heard and answered her prayer? He rushed forward and prostrated himself upon the ground beside the still white figure, and repeated her name again and again in an agonised appeal.

“Kate, Kate, my heart’s one idol—Kate, my own and only darling, live for me! Do not leave me, darling. Oh Kate, Kate! you shall never leave me again!”

He drew her to his breast. How cold she was,

how wan! but she was not dead; she was his own, his very own. He sat upon the damp ground with Kate in his arms, the moon shone out upon their love, and Kate opened her large dark eyes with a glorified expression, looking up into the passion-pleading face bent over her.

"You love me, darling," he murmured, holding her cold hands in his.

"I love you—God knows I love you, love!" she answered solemnly, for which assurance he rained eager kisses upon her upturned face. "Dr. Cartland," she whispered, "are you not going to marry Laura?" and even at the thought her features were distorted by pain.

"Marry Laura!" he repeated after her. "My little Kate, how can you mock me? Don't you know that my life is yours. I would give up every earthly wish for you. I am not a religious man, as you know; in fact I think my Kate one day called me an unbeliever, so I have no fear of after-punishment, to take away from my happiness; but I am not an unbeliever, for I believe in you, my heart's darling." Then, after a pause, Kate lying happily passive in his arms, he looked up: "As I said before, darling, I don't believe in much,

and I certainly don't kneel down each day to ask for daily bread, and yet when I saw you lying there in your white dress, with your dear pale face, I have an idea that I called upon His name. Kate! somehow you open a higher life to me ; help me from myself, darling ; teach me to be pure and good like you."

Kate trembled.

"How happy we should have been, Dr. Cartland !"

"Should have been, my love—shall be, you mean. Kate, we will never part again. Come home and be more to me than wife."

Wife ! That name recalled her. His wife she could never be. Come home ! her heart bounded wildly at the invitation, how she longed to make her home upon his breast ! But at the word "Wife," George's face arose before her pale and stern, and she gave a cry of pain.

"Dr. Cartland, spare me—spare George. You know I cannot be your wife. I am his."

"Hush, hush, my love," he whispered, soothingly. "You are mine now, you have given yourself to me, you are not his ! Not my wife ? Why,

Kate, what does that word convey to you? A foolish promise, rashly spoken by a young and inexperienced girl, or the true love of a noble woman's heart? My little Kate, which makes a woman most a wife? Love, or a promise which it is more sinful to keep than to break? Kate, you are mine! If there be a God, I claim you before Him—to come to me—yes! to be mine forever.”

She was carried away by his words, by his will, by their joint love. She trembled in his embrace, and yet crept closer.

“Come, Kate! yes, now!” and he rose with difficulty, his burden in his arms.

“Put me down,” she begged; “I want to speak to you.”

He placed her on her feet. How stiff and numb she was! and away from his warmth, how cold!

“Dr. Cartland,” she whispered, “how can I go, with Laura here?”

“True,” he answered, “I had forgotten her. To-morrow, love, I will come for you.”

“And you never loved her?” asked Kate, looking in his face earnestly.

“Never, Kate; I have never cared for any

woman in my life except you—never shall—you are my one love,” and he drew her to him passionately; and then: “How cold you are, my little one. Selfish that I have been to keep you standing, with this thin dress, in the night air. To-morrow, love! Oh how you shiver! Good-night, sweetheart! Good-night!”

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY.

MISS PERKINS had sat a great deal at her window lately, she was still there watching the passers by, and ever and anon casting a hasty glance at the gate which faced her own, and at the peep of rose-clad house between the trees. “The drawing-room blind has not been up since Saturday, and that man’s carriage has never been once at the door since Friday. Something very unusual must be going on, and yet I have never heard a whisper.” Miss Perkins got a little weary of her “sentry-go,” so set up a book to help away the time, and getting engrossed by it, almost left off her occupation of spider, till the stopping of wheels opposite brought

her suddenly back from fiction to every-day life and stern facts.

"Good heavens!" shrieked the small old maid, "a hearse! Then someone is dead there, and that is why the blinds are down. Who can it be? I must find out." But just as she was retreating from the window, her attention was arrested again by the movements outside, and to her surprise, instead of a coffin being brought from the house, the doors of the hearse were opened and a magnificent coffin of polished oak, richly ornamented with silver devices and inscription-plate, was drawn forth, and it was evident that it was not empty, for the two men who bore it staggered under its weight. Several frightened white-faced servants were now upon the scene. Miss Perkins opened the window and listened. The parlour-maid was addressing one of the carriers.

"But who told you to bring that here?" said the girl. "We were not expecting anything of that sort; and oh, it's dreadful!"

"Here's my directions," said the man roughly, handing her a written paper. "'Mrs. Grafton, Hazelhurst House, Hazelhurst,' and here I must leave her."

"Her," cried the girl, "who is it?"

"Can't say," replied the man doggedly.

"Do you mean you don't know?" persisted the girl.

"I never knows nothing, but what I am told, and the gent, he gives me this, and says: 'Drive the party inside to that address, and say as I am coming down to make all necessary arrangements this afternoon.'"

"Yes!" said she, "but who *is* the gent?"

"Well, I suppose you will know him when you sees him, miss; but if you was to ask questions from now till the day of judgment, I couldn't tell you."

The other servants had listened to the conversation, and a happy thought struck the coachman:

"Well, I suppose you know where you brought the body from?" he said, with an air of authority.

"London."

"London! eh? but you see, mister, London's a large place, what street may it have been, now?"

"Can't say—didn't look at the name—it was early—hardly light when the gent knocked at my door and asked if I wanted a job, and when I said 'Yes,' he said I was to put two 'osses into a 'earse

at once ; and when I was ready I got on to my box, and up he jumped beside me."

"With you ?" cried all the servants in a breath.

"On the box with me," answered the man solemnly. "His orders was, 'Drive straight on till I tell you to stop ;' and I did. It was almost dark, and I didn't notice nothink partikler. All at once he calls out for me to stop, and I stopped ; and then he opens the doors with a key, and he goes upstairs, and then I see a woman who looked scared like, and I thought she was a-goin' to talk to me ; but just then he says, 'Come up,' and me and my mate went up, and he desired me to take charge of that"—pointing to the coffin, now half out of the hearse, half in—"and he give me this address, and paid me handsome ; and if you was to keep me talking all day I couldn't tell you no more."

"I don't think we had better take it in," remarked the cook, who was very nervous and frightened.

"You see we haven't received no orders. Couldn't you leave it at the Green Man till we know, sir ?" asked the housemaid.

"No ! I couldn't," answered the man sharply.

"My orders was to leave it here—are you ready Tom?"—turning to his mate. "If you won't take it in I'll leave it on the doorstep—time is money to me—I'm in a hurry."

And the men carried the coffin to the steps and put it down.

"Will you take it in, or no?" said the undertaker; "it seems rather indecent like to leave a body out here in the hot sun."

While he was speaking the servants had noticed the plate on the coffin, and were now gathered round reading it.

The parlour-maid shrieked, "Oh! look, look, it's missus herself!"

"Nonsense," said the coachman sharply, "I drove the missus and Miss Grafton to the station myself on Saturday; it can't be her." And then he read aloud: "Katharine Grafton, wife of George Grafton, Esquire, Hazelhurst House, Hazelhurst, died September 3rd, 187—, aged 20."

"Shall we go in?" inquired the undertaker. "You seem to know the lady."

"Yes, go in," said the coachman. "Know her! ay, I should think we did, she was the prettiest lady as ever you set eyes on, and as good a

mistress as ever lived. When my child died last winter she was very kind to me and my good woman. You should have seen her sitting in her handsome dresses nursing that child. Yes, he died in her arms, died hard of convulsions, poor little fellow! and then she spoke like a sister to my wife, she did. She paid for the funeral, and a handsome one it was. We've lost a good friend in Mrs. Grafton!" and the man rubbed his coat-sleeve across his eyes. The women were all crying, for they were attached to their mistress. All at once they perceived another figure among them—a man dressed in deep black—evidently dreadfully agitated, with a pale set face.

"Oh, I am glad you are come, sir," said the parlour-maid, "if anything could gladden one at such a time. Oh sir! is it not dreadful? my poor missus." And the girl began to sob heartily.

"For God's sake get her into the house! don't stand here for the neighbours to gape at!"

And without another word Mrs. Grafton's coffin was carried into the house, from whence only the Saturday before she had walked out at the same door, with a smile upon her lips, in the prime of her youth and beauty.

Dr. Cartland attended to everything, ordered the funeral, saw the clergyman, wrote to Dr. Grafton, wrote to Miss Ansell, wrote to George. He did not telegraph to him—of what use could it be? He could not possibly be home for the funeral; details could be better told in a letter; at the best of times telegrams are unsatisfactory things.

Dr. Cartland did not remain at the house, but came down every day; that is, he came on the two intervening days before the funeral took place.

Mrs. Grafton was brought home on the Wednesday, and on the Saturday she was to be buried.

On the Friday Miss Ansell arrived. She had come to see her niece once more, and to follow her to her last resting-place. Dr. and Mrs. Grafton had come also.

Miss Ansell directed one of the servants to take her to the room where the body of her niece lay. She walked with a firm step; stiffer than ever in appearance, harder in face, no emotion was visible in her cold gray eyes.

The coffin was covered with wreaths of lovely hot-house flowers, placed upon it by friendly hands. The sight of them did not please Miss Ansell.

She beckoned to the maid. "Remove that rubbish and open the coffin!"

"Open the coffin!" repeated the girl in a hushed voice. "Lor, miss, it's screwed down!"

"When was it screwed down?" asked Miss Ansell.

"Oh! how do I know, mum—miss—I beg your pardon? Before she was brought home, poor dear! And only to think that master, who loved her so, should be abroad and know nothing about it."

"Who has seen Mrs. Grafton since she died?" and Miss Ansell fixed her eyes sternly upon the girl.

"Why, Dr. Cartland, ma'am. He gave the certificate of her death, I believe, and she died of inflammation of the lungs, which carried her off quite sudden."

Miss Ansell grew more rigid and stiff at every word.

"Who else has seen her?" she asked.

"No one that I am aware of. The doctor——"

"I don't want to hear any more about the doctor, girl; tell me all *you* know about your mistress since Mr. Grafton left!"

"Well, miss, after master went away Mrs. Grafton seemed to fret very much. She stayed indoors, and she got to look very pale, and then Dr. Cartland came to call."

"When was that?" interrupted Miss Ansell.

"That was a week or ten days after master went away. Dr. Cartland came two or three times."

"What did he come for? Was my niece ill?"

"Yes! master had put missus into Dr. Cartland's hands to doctor, for I heard him talking to him in the passage the last time they met, and he said to the doctor: 'Harry, take care of her as if she were your own sister. I don't like the look of her at all—poor Kate! she has grown pale and thin;' and then Dr. Cartland asked if there was any consumption in the family, but I didn't hear master's answer, for I had passed out of ear-shot."

"Well, miss, to go on with my story: Miss Grafton then came and stayed a month, and we all thought as how the doctor was sweet upon her, for they used to sit and whisper-like, and poor missus she mostwise sat apart at her work, and looked low and forsook-like. Dr. Cartland was

here last on Friday—I mean before she died—it was Miss Grafton's last night, and she and the doctor sat together till late, and missus went out in the garden alone. When she came in she was as white as marble, and as cold. I went up to her room and asked her to have something hot, but she wouldn't. She asked where Miss Grafton was, and I went to see if she was in the drawing-room, but she had gone to bed, and I went back to tell missus and found her all of a shiver. She said she had been sitting out in the garden with nothing on, and caught cold. I went and got her a hot bottle, for her feet were like stones, and she thanked me and seemed glad of it. I called her next morning, and she was feverish, and said she had a pain in all her limbs, and she coughed. She said if it had not been Miss Grafton's last morning, she would have breakfasted in bed, but she had promised to go up to London with her and see her off at Paddington. At eleven o'clock they started off in the carriage. Missus seemed more herself, and turned round and asked me to order something nice for her dinner, as she had not time to see about it, and I did. I ordered her as pretty a little dinner for one as you would wish to see, but

she didn't come back. She telegraphed to cook to say she was not feeling well, and so should remain in London with friends for a day or two. And the next we heard of her, miss"—and Mary wiped her eyes on the corner of her white apron—"the next we heard of her was when they brought her home like that!" and the girl pointed to the coffin.

"What was the undertaker's name?" asked Miss Ansell.

"The undertaker's name here is Winters, miss. I don't know the name of the man who brought her from London."

"What! you didn't take his name and address?"

"No, miss; we were just questioning him when Dr. Cartland came, and the man went away."

"Go, and give my compliments to Dr. Grafton, girl, and say I wish to speak to him here;" and Mary went eagerly, glad to escape Miss Ansell's questionings and stern looks.

When the old lady found herself alone, she passed her hand quickly across her forehead as if to clear away the clouds from her conscience.

"I must do my duty," she muttered. "She is, or she is not, in that coffin. It must be my duty to clear up the mystery, even though it bring a

scandal on my own family ; no matter what comes of it, Maria Ansell must do her duty."

And she turned her back upon the dead woman, and watched with a flinty face the opening of the door.

Dr. Grafton was rather afraid of the stern spinster, and obeyed her command at once. He had been fond of his daughter-in-law, and regretted her sudden death, both for her sake and for the sake of the son who was in a foreign land, unknowing the loss he had sustained of the wife he so dearly loved. He was, as I said, afraid of Miss Ansell ; but he was quite unprepared for what she had to say to him. The semaphore-like arms pointed to a vacant chair, and then she seated herself so as to look him full in the face.

"Dr. Grafton," she said, "as a man of honour and a Christian, are you doing your duty?"

"My duty," stuttered the little man, "with reference to what? Believe me, I never willingly neglect my duty, but I am at a loss to understand you."

"Then of course you have ascertained where your daughter-in-law died, and you have convinced yourself that she is dead ; you can answer for it

that she has not been *murdered*! In fact, Dr. Grafton, you have, of course, identified her body, and have had a post-mortem examination of the same!"

The little man got very pale, and sprang from his chair in great agitation.

"Surely, surely, madam, you cannot for one moment imagine that there has been any foul play. It is impossible—simply impossible!" and he sank down again dejectedly in his seat, as a bottle of soda-water after the first fizz and splutter subsides.

Miss Ansell continued, mercilessly pointing with a long bony finger to the coffin:

"I repeat, have you identified her?"

"I—I—no! I can't say I have. I never thought of what seems to me so unheard of—I—I—might even say so *indecent*—a proceeding as re-opening a coffin, unless there were grounds for suspicion."

"Tut, tut," interrupted Miss Ansell impatiently; "perhaps it's filled with bricks!"

"Madam," cried Dr. Grafton, "remember she was my son's wife!"

"Perhaps," continued Miss Ansell, waving him into silence—"perhaps you will find her with her throat cut!"

"Good God!" cried the unfortunate man, beads of perspiration starting out upon his clammy brow.

"Who—who, I say, could wish to injure such a sweet woman as Kate? No! no! the thing's absurd—unheard of. Kate could have had no enemies, and we have Dr. Cartland's certificate of her death. You must have forgotten this, Miss Ansell."

"I have forgotten nothing, sir," said that lady stiffly; "but Dr. Cartland may be the greatest villain unhung, for all I know of him; he may have murdered the girl himself."

Dr. Grafton smiled.

"I can assure you Dr. Cartland is thought very highly of in his profession. I do not for a moment think he would give a false certificate; nor do I believe he had any grudge against Kate. Why, they were the best of friends, George, Kate, Cartland, and all. No, no! Miss Ansell, we may leave the poor child at peace. Laura tells me she had a fearful cough. I, as a medical man, can assure you that inflammation of the lungs often kills very quickly. Poor Kate! She was a sweet young woman, and my son will lose a good wife in her."

Miss Ansell looked at him steadily, and then

spoke: "I believe you are only a fool, Dr. Grafton, though your conduct might be taken for that of a knave. I mean to have this coffin opened to-night. If she be in it, there must be medical opinion as to whether she died by fair means ; and, if there be any uncertainty upon the subject, I mean to have a post-mortem. Now I am going to see the clergyman and the magistrate about it. You will find I can do my duty. I wish you good-day, sir!" And Miss Ansell stalked out of the room.

Dr. Grafton rose too, but only to go over to the coffin. He gently smoothed the flowers with his hand. "My poor girl," he murmured, "if I thought for one moment that anyone had done you a wrong, I would let them disturb you even now ; but who should want to injure you, my little Kate?" and something very like a tear fell upon the white blossoms. "Before Heaven, I swear I would avenge you, child," continued the old man, "if I thought that anyone had harmed a hair of your head, but I do not ; and why should I subject you to scandal and gossip in your grave? I must try and stop this strong-minded old woman from her purpose ;" and he turned and quitted the room.

But Miss Ansell was not to be stopped ; she had

already left the house when Dr. Grafton went to seek her, and succeeded in alarming the clergyman and the magistrate ; and before daylight waned, all concerned were in Kate Grafton's room waiting painfully while the undertaker, with a grating sound, unturned the screws, and did the needful work, so that the dead woman might again be brought into the light of day.

Dr. Cartland was present, and, by his wish, Kate's maid. Eager anxious faces watched to see the occupant of the narrow house. Dr. Cartland was pale as the face which was revealed to them when the lid was at last raised ; but he was quiet and calm, and very unlike a man who is about to look upon the woman he has murdered. Everyone almost involuntary glanced at him. He neither sought nor shunned their gaze ; but after looking for some time at the face of the dead, he said :

"She is sadly altered since I saw her last ; so she will hardly be recognisable to you, Dr. Grafton."

The father-in-law gazed earnestly at the corpse. "She *is* altered, but the features are the same. Yes ! it is my daughter-in-law ; but how much older she looks, and how disfigured !"

"Yes," said Dr. Cartland, "when people die in a full habit of body they very quickly change." There was an almost imperceptible tone of relief in his voice, as he continued, "I am glad that you are satisfied, Dr. Grafton, that I have not deceived you."

"I never for one moment supposed you had, Dr. Cartland," said the elder man, grasping the hand of the other. "This investigation has been entirely at the wish of, and to satisfy, Miss Ansell, who I hope *is* satisfied now."

"I would not swear to that's being my niece," she answered stiffly. "She is strangely altered if her death was a natural one."

Mrs. George Grafton's maid here looked up eagerly: "I could identify my mistress; if I might be allowed to raise her sleeve just above the wrist, there will be a scratch. I did it myself, putting her skirt over her head, only a few days ago; there was a pin in the dress. I did not notice it. Mrs. Grafton was very kind, and only laughed, and said I had spoilt her beauty, and she must wear long sleeves till it was well; but she straightway put on a white muslin with open ones, which showed the scratch, which looked red and sore."

Miss Ansell at once stepped forward.

"Which arm?" she asked.

"The left, ma'am."

And in another moment the arm lay bared. Death's discoloration was upon it, but there was also a scar like the one the girl spoke of.

"I will swear to that," said the girl. "Yes, that is my poor dear mistress!"

Dr. Cartland turned to Miss Ansell: "Are you satisfied now? I trust so, for my friend George Grafton's sake; these investigations are most painful to *me*. He would not, I am sure, like his dead wife to be subjected to further inspection," and he gently closed one of the coffin-lids.

"You are right, Cartland," said Dr. Grafton.

The clergyman and magistrate had remained silent spectators of the scene; and they now both advanced, with kind words of regret for the dead woman; but said they were thankful that there was no ground for suspicion.

But they were soon interrupted by the stern old maid: "I am the only living relation of Mrs. George Grafton; this investigation has only satisfied me that she is dead; the next question is how she came by her death? I must insist on a post-mortem examination!"

In vain everyone argued with her. She had her own way, and the examination took place the next morning before the proper authorities ; and it was decided, without doubt, that George Grafton's wife had died of inflammation of the lungs ; and there was nothing left to do but to transplant her into "God's Acre." And even Miss Ansell was satisfied that everyone had done their duty, and that Kate's death was a plain fact, and no mystery after all.

CHAPTER VI.

BERYL CHANTLER.

AMONG the passengers bound for Ceylon were a Mr. and Mrs. Chantler and their daughter, a young girl of fifteen years old, a fragile fairylike little creature, very childish for her age, shrinking from even the most commonplace acquaintance with her fellow-travellers on board the *May Queen*. Beryl Chantler loved her parents with the passionate devotion which is felt sometimes by an only child, who has no brothers or sisters to share his or her heart amongst. Beryl had no room in hers for any image save those two, who filled it to overflowing.

A sincere friendship grew up between Mr. Chantler and George Grafton. They had both lost their money from the failure of coffee crops, both were on their way to try and retrieve their fortunes, but Mr. Chantler had harder work before him than George Grafton. He had bought his coffee plantation from another man, knowing nothing about it himself, and found he had made a bad bargain—had, in fact, been taken in. And now he had made up his mind to settle in Ceylon, and work the plantation himself, when he should have learnt to do so ; whereas George only meant to put things straight, and then return to his home and his wife, whose image he kept green in his heart. He had promised to help Mr. Chantler too, and put him in the right way of working his property, and both men were standing on deck with hopeful hearts, not more than a couple of days' journey from their destination. They were talking cheerfully of their future, when the captain's voice broke in upon them.

"We shall have an ugly night, gentlemen. Do you see the golden rim round the moon? A storm is not many hours off, I'll warrant."

The elements rose slowly but surely. Black

clouds banked the moon in until it was hidden utterly in the darkness of the night, but still the May Queen kept on her course, and the captain stuck to his post like a man. But suddenly in the blackness they heard his voice :

“ Good God ! there is a light on our right. We are out of our course. If that should prove to be the Maldiv Islands we are lost ! ”

He was speaking to his first lieutenant, but before he had time to issue any orders they struck suddenly on the rocks, and the good ship shivered from stem to stern with the knowledge of her doom. The fires were quickly put out by the rushing rapidly-increasing water. The captain was calm and collected. He ordered the boats to be lowered ; he called on all men on board to help to save life, for the good May Queen would sink more suddenly than they were aware. He told them he should stick to the old craft and share her doom, with just a quiver in his voice as he remembered the dear ones who would await his return in vain. He ordered torches to be lighted, and by their glare they saw with dismay that no boat could live in such a sea, upon which he desired rafts to be constructed, and upon them many of

the passengers were launched upon the angry ocean, while others, refusing to believe in the extreme danger of the ship, preferred remaining on board, and many persisted in getting into the boats, which upset at once, adding to the horror of the scene by the shrieks of the struggling drowning wretches. The large raft had been launched with its freight of human lives. There had been a fearful struggle for places on it, in which George and the Chantlers had taken no part. They were still upon the deck of the *May Queen*. The captain had watched off the raft, when his eyes fell on the little group.

"Mr. Chantler," he cried, "why did you not go on the raft? She will ride the waves in safety."

"We are three," he answered. "Three. It was a case of every man for himself. How they fought for a place! like demons let loose."

"By my word!" said the captain, "this lily blossom shall not perish if I can help it," taking Beryl by the hand. "Miss Beryl, I have a daughter too, a fair girl like you; kiss me for her sake, child. I shall never see her sweet face again!"

Beryl Chantler, usually so shy, seemed un-

daunted by the danger, and looking up in the captain's torch-lit face, she saw the tears he was shedding for his child, and straightway went and put her arms about his neck, and kissed him. Her parents had moved some distance off, so as not to intrude upon his grief. George Grafton had not heard these words. He was just coming up with some spars attached to some ropes which he held in his hand, when the *May Queen* lurched head foremost into the water; but George Grafton, Beryl Chantler, and the captain were not yet engulfed. George seized the girl in his arms, and with the seaman's help attached her to the spars which they had hurriedly lashed together. In the excitement Beryl was mercifully spared the knowledge of her parents' fate.

"Go with her," cried the captain; "for the love of God be quick!" and George was, with a few masterly knots, secured to the little raft with Beryl Chantler for his companion. He held the girl's hands for sympathy and to help her face the death which he doubted not was to be their joint portion. The captain, and a few of the sailors who stood by him, launched them safely, and the girl clung silently to the hand she held.

Once she tried to pierce the darkness, and asked George where her parents were, and he had answered her :

“They are safe, dear child !” upon which she had become contented.

They heard the captain’s voice now at a little distance, calling out to George to take care of her, and then there came a mighty rush as the waters overwhelmed the May Queen.

Day was beginning to break, and the two passengers on that little raft looked around to see who else had been saved besides themselves, but they were so small, and the waves so high, that they could discern nothing ; the wind had gone down, but the sea was troubled still. The sun arose, and beat upon them mercilessly, and they soon suffered acutely from thirst. The sea was like a millpond now, as the sun was about to set, when all at once George heard a sound that made his heart leap for joy. He could plainly distinguish the oscillation of paddle-wheels, or a screw ; and in due time a steamer came in sight of them, and was within hail. Her captain seemed to be on the look-out for them, for he had stopped and lowered a boat. Kind hands soon extricated

both Beryl and George from their cramped and painful position, and had lifted them into the boat. The poor girl, who had kept up a brave heart through all the dangers of that dreadful night and day, was now ready to faint at the reaction, when the strain was taken off. She heard the officer in command telling George how they had rescued a number of those who had left the wreck on the raft, and her eager eyes sought the steamer's deck, to try and discover those she loved among the watchers' faces. She was too exhausted to remember whether her parents had gone on the raft or no. She knew George had said "they were safe," and she concluded that they had been picked up like the others. In this belief she managed, with help, to get on board the steamer, and then when the little band of saved ones pressed around to welcome her, she faintly asked if her parents were among them ; and upon hearing the answer, fell senseless on the deck.

George was by her in a second, and also the young officer who had come to the rescue, who, if truth must be told, had fallen in love with the fragile girl at first sight, perhaps because she was so young and fair and delicate-looking, while he,

with his bronzed face and powerful frame, looked to belong to another world. George essayed to lift her, but he was worn out, and the young sailor pressed eagerly forward.

"You are tired, sir, let me carry your—this lady—to my cabin!" and without another word he descended with his burthen between decks, followed by George; and Beryl was laid upon the sailor's little bed. He gazed long upon that lily face, and then turned abruptly to George. "Is she your sister, sir?"

"No," he answered, with a smile at the young man's eagerness.

"No? surely she is not your *wife*?"

George laughed out.

"The young lady is Miss Beryl Chantler, aged fifteen. Her parents—God rest them!—were drowned last night. I am, as far as I know, her only friend on earth, and I shall take her home as a present to my wife, as soon as my work at Ceylon is done."

Charles Summers gave a sigh of relief, if such a powerful noise coming from so brawny a chest could be called by that name. This, then, was no rival, he thought; and he fell to

looking again at the inanimate little face upon his pillow.

"What is your name?" asked George.

"Summers—Charles Summers. And yours?"

"Grafton," answered George. "And now, Mr. Summers, can you find a doctor? or if you have not one on board, be good enough to bring some brandy."

"You don't think Miss Chantler is very ill, do you, Mr. Grafton? We have no doctor on board. You see, we have come for a cargo here, not with passengers, but I can get you plenty of brandy, and the captain has a medicine chest."

"Never mind medicine; it is exhaustion. We must try and get her round, and then give her some food. She is famished, poor girl. Look sharp, my good fellow; you can gaze when you come back;" and the sailor rushed off, and soon came back laden with the brandy and the best food he could procure for Beryl.

It was a strange sight, those two strong men bending over the pale childish form, rubbing brandy upon her hands, and feet, and brow—putting birdlike sips between her lips. Soon their efforts were crowned with success. Beryl

Chantler opened her eyes ; she looked at Charles Summers, but did not remember him, and then she looked at George, and said :

“Oh Mr. Grafton ! tell me the truth—are my parents safe ? You told me they were safe.”

George took her hand in his.

“Little Beryl ! I will be your friend as long as I live. You will soon love my wife, and be happy with her.”

“But my parents,” she cried, “are *they* safe ?”

“Yes, Beryl ; safe from all further sorrow and trouble ; safe from disappointment and care Together, and at rest ; ‘safe in the arms of Jesus !’ Looking down with loving eyes upon their child, telling her to keep up a brave heart, to be a good woman, and to join them in their happy home hereafter.”

A spasm shot through the girl’s blue eyes, the dilated pupils looked at George with a vague horror for a moment, and then she burst into an agony of tears.

“Father ! mother ! come back to me ! don’t leave me alone ! Come back, I have no one but you ! Oh mother ! mother !”

George drew the girl close to him, but did not

by words interrupt her passion of grief. He judged rightly it was best over, that tears would bring relief, the storm be followed by a calm. It was Beryl's first trouble!

George Grafton was as good as his word, he was a friend indeed to the orphan girl. Directly they landed at Ceylon, he made a home for her. At first he was going to put her to board in a family; but she entreated him not to send her among strangers. So he got his overseer's wife to live at his house, and take care of Beryl, and the girl repaid him by the devotion of a dog; would follow him for hours, or sit by him silently, ever on the watch for his least whim or wish. George was always kind to Beryl Chantler, but his love for his wife was too great for him to notice the girl's affection for him, if he thought of it at all he considered it only natural she should be fond, of the man who had been her parents' friend. But Beryl felt more than this. The deep devotion of her nature had belonged to her parents while they lived; and now that they were dead, they were still beloved, but youth needs more than a memory to cling to, and Beryl had set up George in her heart as an idol to be worshipped, without once

thinking that such a love and worship would be wrong. She believed him to be perfect, and she would have given her life to save him from one pang of sorrow. Such a love as Elaine in her gentleness gave to Launcelot, Beryl Chantler bestowed on George Grafton. He, like Launcelot, had given his heart to another ; and dreamed not of the love he had awakened. So time wore on, and Beryl was almost happy even without her parents, being near him, seeing his face, hearing his voice.

George found his plantation was not in the bad condition he had supposed ; good news, indeed, to him, when he was daily and hourly longing to be back in that pretty peaceful home at Hazelhurst, where he pictured his wife in her floating white muslins, relieved, as was her wont, with some crimson flower. He had received one or two letters from her, friendly, affectionate letters, such as might have come from a loving sister to a valued brother. But George, never suspicious, failed to miss the ring of the true metal of wifely love.

It was a fortnight now since he had heard, and he was sitting silently with Kate's last letter in his hand. He had read it often and often and been cheered by it, but, somehow, to-day his spirits

were at zero ; and the well-read note failed to rouse him out of himself. He did not even see Beryl, who sat watching him almost hidden among the folds of the curtains.

"I cannot bear it," he murmured ; "I wish I had never left my darling ! How do I know what ill may befall her ? And how she begged me not to go ! Kate ! Kate ! what presentiment of evil is upon me ? I had an offer for the plantation to-day. Shall I take it ? We should not be rich, but we should have enough for a dinner of herbs, and contentment would make a good sauce to accompany it, and you would never reproach me for poverty, I know, dear Kate."

So intent was he upon his thoughts that he failed to notice the entrance of a servant with letters, but when he saw them, he rushed eagerly at them, and scanned the writing of each hastily till he came to the last.

"None from Kate," he cried, and sank despondingly down in his chair again, no longer in a hurry to open them ; but presently there came into his mind a vague idea of black borders, and he turned once more to the letters. His father's writing was the first to greet him ; his letter was

kind and consolatory, offering George the deepest sympathy in his trial, speaking with loving regret of poor Kate, and saying how unspeakably shocked they had all been at her sudden death, and ending by mentioning the care and kindness Dr. Cartland had shown her in her illness.

A deadly pallor overspread his face as he read, a deep groan escaped his lips, but he uttered no word.

Beryl saw his anguish, and with nervous clasping hands, watched him, afraid to move ; afraid to interrupt his grief, whatever it might be ; fearing to seem to pry into it if she moved near, or offered her sympathy ; watching his face with the expression of dumb compassion and sympathetic sorrow which a faithful dog would have for his beloved master.

George next opened a letter from Miss Ansell, announcing her niece's sudden death ; and telling him that, having considered it open to suspicion, she had deemed it her duty to have it properly investigated ; but she was glad to be able to inform him that Kate had died from natural causes. She expressed no sorrow for her niece's death, or regret for her husband's sufferings, but begged him to

humble himself under the Lord's chastening hand, lest worse evil might befall him!

"Worse evil!" he thought; "what worse evil could come to him than losing the wife he had loved so dearly?" and he tossed Miss Ansell's letter from him with disgust.

The next, which was from Dr. Cartland, must be given verbatim :

"MY DEAR GEORGE,—This letter must needs be very painful to me to write, and to you to read, though I know your pain must exceed what is felt by me or anyone else. I had better give you a detailed account of your dear wife's last illness, and subsequent death. I did not see Mrs. Grafton for some time after you left. I did not like to intrude upon her natural regret at your absence. When I called she told me Miss Grafton was coming to stay with her, which I was glad to hear, as she seemed low and out of spirits. I was often at your house during your sister's visit. Mrs. Grafton did not seem well or lively as she used to be. Then, after a month's stay, Miss Grafton left, and your wife went to London to see her off. I did not know that she intended to do so, and went to

the station to see if I could be of any use to your sister. I was very much shocked at the change in Mrs. Grafton, and she coughed distressingly—her cheeks were flushed, her lips parched. Miss Grafton and I both said how sorry we were she had attempted the journey, but she said it was nothing, at least only a cold she had caught going into the garden the evening before—she should be all right in a day or two. We had not much time to spare before Miss Grafton was in the train and steaming from the platform, then I took Mrs. Grafton to my carriage, which was waiting. I noticed her breathing, and felt her pulse, and saw at once the only chance of saving her was to get her to bed immediately, so without even asking her leave, I drove her to a respectable lodging I knew of, and persuaded her to come in. She was inclined to be angry with me at first, but was too ill to raise many objections. I proposed sending for another medical man, but she would not hear of it. Of what use to go through the sad details? I telegraphed, in her name, to her servants, not to expect her home.

“My dear George, I could not save her! I called in another medical man when I found she was getting rapidly worse. She could not speak

when he arrived, and very shortly afterwards she died of simple suffocation from inflammation of the lungs. I did what I thought you would wish in the ordering of her coffin, and having done so I hired a hearse and had her taken to her home. I arrived there about the same time, and was annoyed to find an unseemly discussion going on as to whether your servants would take in the coffin—they all seemed afraid of their own shadows. I wrote at once to Dr. Grafton and Miss Ansell, and made all arrangements for the funeral. I grieve to tell you Miss Ansell made herself very objectionable, protesting that she believed her niece had been murdered, and that she should do her duty—and she did it, if re-opening your wife's coffin in the presence of witnesses, and a post-mortem examination, was her duty.

“I need hardly tell you all this has occasioned much Hazelhurst talk, and I did all I could to prevent it. But Miss Ansell pointed at *me* as the murderer of her niece, so I could do and say no more. I think you know George how sincerely fond I was of Mrs. Grafton, and that her loss would make a terrible blank in the life of a man

who has no 'kith and kin,' has many acquaintances, but makes few friends. Miss Ansell is now satisfied that the only mystery was the death itself, which poor dear Kate has gone to solve. You know, my dear fellow, how truly sorry I am for you. With kind regards, your sincere friend,

"H. CARTLAND."

George read the letter through like a man in a dream, and then covered his face with his hands in the vain endeavour to shut out the ghastly truth—that Kate was dead and buried. The horrible spectacle of the post-mortem examination came before him—the gossip that had followed. She had died alone, no friend of her own sex with her; no one but Cartland. "Oh God! help me to bear it!" he cried out in the agony of his mind.

Beryl heard the words, and could no longer keep away from his side. He started when she laid her tiny hand on his. It took his fancy, even in his grief, that she looked like a ministering angel, standing beside him dressed in soft pure white.

"Let me help you, dear," she pleaded. "What is your trouble? I too have suffered, Mr. Grafton!"

and the tears stole down her cheeks in sorrow for herself and him.

He only patted the small hand, and she crept to his feet silently, and nestled there, which was more comforting than all the words she could have uttered. There was nothing for George to go home for now, so he gave himself up to work, and grew rapidly rich again. He talked but little to Beryl, but found comfort in her presence. He had told her all the story of his life, and of his wife's sad and sudden death; and she had listened, grieving for his grief, sorrowing for his sorrow, envying the dead woman in her grave who had been so well loved. Beryl's love was all unselfish. She gave *all*, expecting nothing in return, and was contented so that she might be with George.

CHAPTER VII.

MARRIED AGAIN.

GEORGE GRAFTON after some time answered the sad letters he had received announcing the death of his wife, but to Dr. Cartland he entered on his feelings as he did not to the others, telling him

that he trusted to him to do in his absence whatever might be needful, as he should probably never again return to England, where he would be so forcibly reminded of his lost happiness.

Kate had been dead a year and a half, and Beryl had reached her eighteenth birthday. Of late the childishness of her nature had left her ; she was now, at seventeen years of age, a quiet and gentle woman, a *mignonne* little creature, very sweet to look upon. Her rippling fair hair, with the sun shining upon it, seemed like a halo around her innocent face, while the blue eyes would give out flashes of love-light when they rested on George, and the coral lips would smile happily. No one looking on would fail to read her secret, yet George Grafton was ignorant of it, thinking of her still as the child whom it was his duty to protect—of whom he had grown as fond as if she had been his own daughter or younger sister, nothing more. Other love he had none to give, it was buried with his dead wife. So he never saw the light in Beryl's eyes that silently, though eloquently, spoke of love for him. Everyone knew that Beryl Chantler was in love with George Grafton, except George Grafton himself. But

people did not give him credit for this want of knowledge, and began to make unkind remarks upon the intimacy. If Grafton kept that girl in his household, they said, he ought to make her his wife. She was too young and too beautiful to live under the roof of a man of his age.

So poor innocent George was blamed undeservedly, without the least knowledge that he was supposed to be acting wrongly by Beryl.

He had planned for his overseer and his wife to live in his house and arrange it; this he supposed would satisfy Mrs. Grundy; and he had thought no more about it, having no idea what a disagreeable mischief-maker that good lady could prove.

These remarks began rolling about like distant thunder, when George's year of mourning was over; then people supposed he would announce his engagement; but as time went on and he said nothing, the thunder grew decidedly louder, and the lightning more forked, and now the storm was at its height!

The clergyman had made up his mind to "have an explanation with Mr. Grafton," and asked him to dinner for this end.

His name was Summers, and Charles Summers

was his eldest and dearly loved son, who had left Ceylon shortly after taking George and Beryl there; had been back with his ship several times, on each occasion getting more and more enamoured with the fairylike Beryl, but keeping the secret of his love closely locked up in his own heart.

It was only when he again returned and heard all that was said of George and his idol, that he really knew how deep that love was, and he went straight to his father and confessed the whole truth, and Mr. Summers determined to "have it out with George."

The day of the dinner arrived, but with Mrs. and Miss Summers at the table nothing was said, and George was terribly "taken aback," when the three gentlemen being left alone, Mr. Summers suddenly turned to him and said: "When is your marriage to take place, Grafton?"

George turned white to the lips.

"I do not understand you, sir! I thought you knew that I have lost a wife I dearly loved, and that I could never replace her."

"I am sorry to hear this, Grafton; very sorry. I had hoped that your intentions towards that young and friendless girl were honourable, at least."

"What friendless girl?" cried George. "You cannot mean my little Beryl; she is a child, Mr. Summers!"

"She is, I suppose, seventeen or eighteen, and at any rate she is woman enough to love *you*!"

"Poor child," said George, "she is very fond of me. I knew her parents, you know; your son I daresay has told you how she came to me, and I hope I have done my duty by her, and made her as happy as I can. She has been a great comfort to me in my trouble, Mr. Summers, I assure you."

"If you don't mean to marry her, you are doing her a great wrong in keeping her under your roof. Make all the amends you can. I will receive her until you can make arrangements for sending her to your friends."

George pondered.

"Do you really mean that any remarks have been made upon Beryl Chantler living in my house? Why, Mr. Summers, you must know, must have seen a hundred times, that I have a housekeeper—a woman of staid age—the wife of my overseer. The thing is absurd!"

"Absurd or no, you must show people that

they have made a mistake, and you must send Miss Chantler to England."

"Poor Beryl," said George, "she will feel going among strangers very much. I wish she would marry; but if this foolish story gets about it would injure her, I fear."

Charles Summers flushed over face and brow, and then spoke earnestly.

"Grafton, I love Miss Chantler. I know she is as innocent as she is beautiful. I will shield her from any remarks, and will most proudly make her my wife if you think she will take me. I, like others, believed her love yours, and that you were only waiting to marry her until your time of mourning had expired; if I have wronged you, forgive me and be my friend with Beryl."

George Grafton took the young sailor's hand.

"My time of mourning will never expire till I do, Summers. I always fancied you cared for Beryl. I sincerely wish you success, my dear boy. I believe you are a good fellow, Summers; and that if Beryl consents, you will make her happy."

"Thank you, thank you, Grafton; I would lay down my life for her;" and the young sailor seemed quite overcome by his emotion.

"When may I go to her?" he asked.

"Whenever you like—*now* if you please, or lunch with me to-morrow."

Mr. Summers here interrupted them.

"Not to-night, Charles—sleep upon it. Consider well if it will be advisable for you to propose to Miss Chantler. I own, under the circumstances, I consider it an unfortunate infatuation. Still, if it be for your happiness, I will not refuse to receive her as a daughter, for like yourself I believe her to be an innocent girl; but it would be indecorous for you to go to the house, knowing Mr. Grafton to be absent."

When the gentlemen parted, after a great deal of talk, Charles whispered to George to "speak a good word for him" to-morrow morning, and George promised.

After breakfast next morning, instead of going off to his work as usual, George lingered in the room. He found it very difficult to tell Beryl what he had to say, but at last he broke the ice.

"Beryl," he said, "come and sit by me;" and she took up her old place at his feet, looking with her sweet smile confidingly up in his face.

"My little Beryl," he said, his hand wandering

amidst her waving tresses, "it has been a great comfort to me to have you with me, but I am going to break up my home here and travel, and we must part, Beryl. You have been a daughter to the lonely man, dear child, and have helped me to bear my sorrow ; but we must part now, Beryl ! You have gained the love of an honest man, dear, and I hope to leave you the happy wife of Charles Summers. He is devoted to you, small Beryl—a second Samson and Delilah—and I hope you will try and return his love. It would make me happier to think of you in such safe hands, dear child. Beryl ! try to make him happy ; but if you cannot give him a wife's love I must send you to England to my mother. She is a good soul, and you will find her and my sisters kind ; but I would rather you had a home of your own."

Beryl had listened with uncertain colour, and when he stopped she raised his eyes to his—such earnest reproachful eyes, and withal so determined.

A look of pain passed over his face.

"I will not leave you," she answered.

"But, Beryl, child, you *must*. I am going to travel."

"I will go with you, Mr. Grafton."

"Child ! child ! how am I to deal with you ?"

"I am not a child now, Mr. Grafton. Say whatever you wish to me : I shall understand you."

"Well, I believe it will be best to tell you the truth, Beryl. People are cruel enough to misjudge me for keeping you here with me. After that, I should do you a grievous wrong to let you stay."

Beryl Chantler turned deadly pale, but showed by no other sign that she understood his words.

"Do you understand me, child ?" he asked, with a shade of impatience in his voice.

"Yes," she answered, "I understand."

"And now, Beryl," he said, in a tone of relief, "you see why you cannot stay with me."

"I see, Mr. Grafton, that you are alone in the world, and that for my sake you would give up your home. I see," she added, with rising colour, "that I have no one in this dreary world but you, my friend and protector, and though I feel the cruelty of the remarks made upon such kindness as yours, I will not leave you."

"Beryl, child ! if you wish to please me, you will accept my friend Charles Summers ; he is worthy of your love. Please me by marrying him, dear."

"Mr. Grafton, I cannot."

"Beryl! naughty Beryl! What am I to do with you? Will you go home to my mother?"

"George," she cried, and large tears gathered in her eyes, "don't send me away! I love you. I love only you in all the wide wide world. Never send me from you. I cannot go. I don't ask much," she pleaded. "I know, oh! how well I know your heart is with her; but let me be your little Beryl still, as I have been now for so long. I can comfort you, George. I can make your life less lonesome to you—that is all I ask; let me be with you; never send me away." And Beryl hid her tearful face, half-ashamed at her own boldness.

George Grafton was troubled—more troubled than words could express. He rose and left the room, and with hasty and uneven strides walked up and down, down and up, his garden.

"What can a man do with a woman who is such a child! and yet the child is a true woman. Beryl, Beryl, what can I do with you?"

Charles Summers at last arrived and asked eagerly whether George had said anything to Beryl.

"Yes!" said he. "I have told her my wishes on the subject, but she is such a strange child, I cannot make her out. Summers," he exclaimed, after a pause, "try your best with her! it is a matter of the utmost import to me that she should marry. I have tried to explain to her what the world thinks of her position in my house; but she is too innocent to understand it. There seems but a choice of *two* things—if you don't marry her, I must; and God knows how bitter it would be to me to be unfaithful to the wife of my love! I have walked up and down here for three hours, and have fought a hard battle with myself, and have come to this decision."

Charles Summers looked at him, then grasped his hand.

"You're a good fellow, Grafton. I see you wish me well with her, but sooner than her good name should be affected, you will sacrifice yourself for her sake. However it ends, God bless you! Now, shall I go to her?"

"Yes, and God prosper your suit for all our sakes."

The luncheon-bell rang, and George went in. He met Charles Summers at the door.

"I can't stop to-day, Grafton! She won't have me at any price; won't give me one ray of hope. George Grafton, she loves *you* with all her heart and soul. You will make her your wife?"

"Yes I will," said George; "and I will try never to let her know what it has cost me."

"We shall not meet again, Grafton," continued Charles Summers. "So long as I know you are in the island, I shall not return here. I shall hear about you all from my father. Good-bye."

The men shook hands again with a hearty grasp, and parted; each with a heavy heart.

When the shades of evening were closing in, George Grafton took Beryl by the hand, and led her out into the garden.

"Beryl, dear! why did you refuse to be Charles Summers' wife?"

No answer.

"If I had asked you instead, would you have refused me?"

Beryl burst into tears.

"Answer me, little one; do you love me enough to have said Yes, if I had asked you to be my wife?"

"I never knew you unkind before, Mr. Grafton," she said, between her sobs. "What pleasure can it be to you, to make me confess what I should do under impossible circumstances?"

"But suppose they are not impossible circumstances? Beryl, will you be my wife?"

"You say it out of pity," she cried.

"I say it, Beryl, because I wish it; because only as my wife I can keep you with me. Will you leave me, child, or will you be my wife?"

"I will be your wife, George," she answered, trembling painfully at the unexpected joy. "I will never leave you."

So George Grafton took Beryl Chantler to be his wedded wife, and vowed to love and to cherish her till death should them part.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO GHOSTS.

GEORGE and Beryl did not leave Ceylon, but lived on in the same house they had occupied for the last two years. Beryl had had one year of unalloyed happiness. Are there many who can say

as much? A whole year of satisfied love, and perfect contentment; so who should say that Beryl had not done well with her life? Little loving Beryl clung to her husband as the ivy to the oak. The oak might have had no wish to wear the ivy, but he gives it his strength nevertheless, and never shows a sign of dissatisfaction; and the ivy twines round him lovingly, and keeps him green amidst the wintry blasts, until he knows he would feel bare and cold without his feeble dependant.

The ties that George had taken upon him out of a sense of duty had now become very dear to him. He could never love his little wife with the ecstatic devotion he had given to his stately beautiful Kate. *She* had been a queen among women, and had commanded his worship and devotion; but he grew very tender towards the fragile little creature who nestled in his breast and called him "husband" with such loving pride. They were very happy, these two—never dreaming of the days of blackness to come.

"What trouble could reach her as George's wife, with him to take care of her?" thought trustful Beryl, basking in the warmth of his love

and kindness ; and yet there was a cloud in the horizon, no bigger than a man's hand as yet, and still unseen by them. The cloud was in this wise.

Miss Ansell's lease was up, and her landlord, intending to live in the house himself, would not renew it, but he had a neat old-fashioned cottage near Maidenhead, and if his tenant liked she should have it at a moderate rent. Miss Ansell went and saw it, liked it, and concluded the bargain, little dreaming that the hand of Fate was leading her into a land of horror, madness, and death ; that her sense of duty would be put to the test for the exposure of sinners, and the breaking of the hearts of the good. Had she known it all, probably she would not have hesitated ; she knew but one creed, and that was duty. Duty was her God—God her duty. The cry of the Publican was foolishness to her ; she had no patience with those who did wrong, and then went cringing for forgiveness. She thanked God—like the Pharisee—did her duty, and needed no repentance. Dear, good, strong iceberg that she was. No ! ice will melt, but not so Miss Ansell. The simile is bad. She was of the hardest flint—of iron, of steel, a petrification—and yet she

really always did what she conceived to be her duty, and, judged by the letter of the law, and weighed in the balance, she could not be found wanting; but she knew not "charity," and surely every other Christian virtue combined, fails to make harmony without that sweet key-note; and Miss Ansell's life was out of tune, discordant, grating. In the old dispensation, when men took an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, she would have been a fine specimen of humanity; but judged by the light shed upon us by the undying love of a dying Saviour, Miss Ansell's religion was unlovely, not pure metal.

She took possession of her cottage, and in due time had settled down into her old groove. She was a great walker, holding the doctrine that God would not have given people legs and feet if He had not intended them to be made use of; and old though she was she certainly made good use of hers. She went into Maidenhead twice a week to do her marketing; and on one of these occasions she saw—*Two Ghosts!*

A face from the dead, and a face of death. She was just about to cross the road, but waited for a carriage to pass. It was going at a rapid

pace, drawn by two fast-stepping bays. It was a close carriage, and both the windows were up. It passed her as a flash of light, and yet she stood transfixed—rooted to the spot—for once in her life frightened out of her calm coldness, for she had seen *two ghosts*.

She laid hold of the arm of a policeman who was passing.

"Whose carriage was that?" she cried.

"Carriage?" said No. 101 coolly, "I don't see no carriage, mum."

"There! there!" shrieked Miss Ansell. "There! going away in that cloud of dust! Quick—quick! I shall lose the clue!"

The policeman eyed her keenly. Mad or drunk? was the problem he was trying to solve, and he paid but little attention to the receding vehicle; but her bony fingers clutched him with such a vigorous tenacity as to arouse his temper.

"Come, ma'am, you'd better move on, or else I shall be under the painful necessity of taking you in charge for obstructing the thoroughfare, for assaulting me, and otherwise breaking the peace. Come—move on, I say!" (as Miss Ansell showed no inclination to let him go).

"Then you won't give me the information I require?" she asked, resuming her usual manner.

"I'm not paid to answer impertinent questions. What does it matter to you whose carriage it was? You didn't think as anyone was running away with yours," he said ironically, "now did you? because in that case, it would be my duty to help you, you know."

Miss Ansell was shrewd; and looking at the avaricious face before her, she said:

"I'll give you half-a-crown for your information."

"Oh! that alters the case," said he, smiling; "but in my profession the fees are paid in advance."

Miss Ansell took a well-worn leather purse from her pocket. It was never very full, and after the unusual expenses of moving, it was now particularly empty, but she selected one shilling, a bent sixpence, two threepenny bits, and one fourpenny bit, one English and one French penny, thereby making up the promised half-crown, and counted them into the policeman's ready palm, meanwhile taking a mental note of the number on his collar!

The man grinned at the motley little collection of coins, and transferred them to his pocket. He had not the remotest idea whose carriage had passed, but he knew that a Mr. Andrews, living close to Maidenhead, owned a similar vehicle to the one he had seen in the distance; so he made up his mind that it was the same, caring very little whether he was right or wrong, and he said unhesitatingly :

"The carriage belongs to Mr. Andrews, a retired city gent ; lives at Fair Lawn, about half a mile out."

"Are you *quite* sure?" Miss Ansell asked.

"Quite;" and they parted, each to go their way—No. 101 to his favourite "public," on the strength of so much small change, and Miss Ansell straight to Fair Lawn.

She went boldly to the hall-door and knocked, asked if anyone was at home, and was at once admitted and ushered into a gaudily-furnished room. On the table stood an enormous candelabra of solid silver, filled with gorgeous artificial flowers; magnificent cabinets stood around the room, on the top of which were groups of alabaster and Parian marble figures, chiefly *undraped* ; the walls

were one mass of looking-glass ; the corners of the room were cut off with inlet glass, making it octagonal in shape. There were panels of looking-glass all round the room ; what amount of wall was left visible was painted—wreaths of flowers on a white ground. The curtains and furniture coverings were of richest yellow (almost orange) satin damask ; in fact, everything bespoke heaps of money and lack of taste.

No one was in the room, and Miss Ansell had ample time to take in her surroundings, which she could only compare with horror to her own holland-clad little chamber, and shudder at. A fit place to find her, indeed ! The house must belong to a Turk, and this must be his divan. Mr. Andrews ! and yet that other face—altered, but still his. Well ! whoever the place belonged to, it was self-evident that it was a den of iniquity. What Christian would live in such rooms ?

And then the door opened, and a large, handsome, vulgar-looking woman entered, and eyed Miss Ansell curiously. This woman looked kind and good-tempered ; but all that the old maid saw was that she was over-dressed, and was “powdered,” and in her mind her character was simply gone.

The large lady bowed, and waved Miss Ansell to a chair, but that virtuous creature would not bow to this "painted Jezebel," as she had called her in her mind, nor would she sit down in such a house. The Venuses and Cupids round the room made her wish to hide her maiden head or their nakedness. She longed to be back in her own decent parlour, where even the legs of her piano-forte were clothed ; but here these nude figures stood boldly round on all sides, reflected everywhere by the everlasting mirrors. Whichever way she looked she could see them. She would have rushed from the room, but duty kept her there.

The large lady sat down and began feeling for her purse. This nameless visitor must want a subscription, probably was the representative of some missionary society, or wished her signature to a petition for "woman's rights."

"You have come on behalf of some society, I suppose?" she said, with a good-humoured smile. "Well, I shall be happy to subscribe. I consider the rich ought to help the poor. It is not in my line to go into dirty stuffy cottages myself ; but I am always ready to assist those who like that sort of thing. Now don't be afraid to tell me what you

want; I have plenty of money;" and she rattled her well-filled purse.

Miss Ansell took no notice whatever of what she should have seen at once was good-natured vulgarity, nothing worse.

"Who are you?" she demanded sternly.

Mrs. Andrews laughed till she shook.

"I really think I ought to be offended at being asked such a question, but I suppose you don't mean to be rude, my good woman."

"Is this Mr. Andrews' house?" asked Miss Ansell.

"Yes, it is. We have purchased the freehold. Beautiful place, isn't it?"

"And you are——" interrupted the old maid.

"I am Mrs. Andrews!" answered that lady, with conscious dignity.

"And you have a dark green carriage, drawn by two bay horses?"

"We have."

"And it has been out this morning—passed through Maidenhead about an hour ago?"

"Good gracious me!" cried Mrs. Andrews, "what can you know about me or my carriage, you strange creature? I must say I think you are cool, and to say the least of it, not polite."

"In that carriage," continued Miss Ansell, ignoring her remark, "was a young woman of two or three and twenty, with a pale face and dark hair ; also a dark man with a black moustache, dark eyes, and a face paler than I have ever seen before. It was not always so pale."

Mrs. Andrews was now watching her anxiously.

"I see you recognise them," said the old maid.

"What of them ?" asked Mrs. Andrews, nervously. "They have gone for a drive, and are not home yet, and the horses are fresh ones, surely you have not come to bring me bad news ! surely nothing has happened !"

"I have come to do my duty. Ay, even if she were my own child I would do it all the same. I have come to denounce her and the villain who was by her side, and having done that I will write to her husband, and now I wish you good-morning."

And before Mrs. Andrews could recover her presence of mind Miss Ansell was upon her road back to Maidenhead, and Mrs. Andrews had come to the alarming conviction that she had enacted the above scene with a mad woman, which was, no doubt, about the only one she was likely to arrive at.

She was still sitting in a most perturbed state of mind, when a young girl of about two-and-twenty entered the room, followed by a dark young man some three years older. These were the son and daughter of Mr. Andrews and his buxom wife.

"Oh my dear children!" exclaimed that lady, "I am so relieved to see you back, have you met with any accident or annoyance?"

"None whatever, mamma," answered the girl. "We have had a delightful drive; we have been to Cookham to call on the Laws."

"Did you see a strange gaunt-looking woman—straight up and down like a yard of pump-water—in Maidenhead?"

"My dear mamma, I have just told you we have been to Cookham, we have not been near the town, and we have not seen any old woman at all!"

"Who is the person you refer to?" asked young Andrews, with languid interest.

He was one of those listless creatures who had "seen life" all through at twenty-five, and was now longing for a new sensation. Everything that money could buy him he had, but he was unable

to purchase "an object in life," so he had to exist without one, and found that existence was but a dull business, notwithstanding his gold, carefully amassed and scraped together by that "City gent," whom policeman No. 101 had referred to—a good hard-working vulgarian whom this elegant son called "governor," and looked upon solely as the "paymaster-general," and was heartily ashamed of for being unrefined and innocent of the letter H.

Mrs. Andrews fanned herself with her handkerchief.

"Oh my dear boy! I wish you had been here to protect me! I have been alone with a mad woman!"

"Well, my dear mother, all I can say is you don't look any the worse for it. What was the sensation, pleasant or otherwise?"

"Don't laugh, Randolph. I assure you, however I may look, my nerves are dreadfully shaken. Oh! she was such an alarming creature, I couldn't help thinking of Solomon Eagle in 'Old St. Paul's,' when she threw out her arm like an avenging spirit, and denounced you and your sister."

"Denounced us?" cried the young people together. "Why! what for? What have *we* done?"

"That was what I wanted to know, but she rushed off like a whirlwind! Oh my dears! I am sure I have had a wonderful escape; we ought all to be very thankful. She couldn't be Solomon Eagle's sister, but she might be his niece. Dear me! let's see, how many years ago was the fire of London, when Solomon Eagle denounced the people from the roof of St. Paul's?"

"Never mind about the Fire of London. Mother, tell me about this old mad woman, I am quite curious about her," said Mr. Randolph Andrews.

"There's not much to tell," said his mother.

"Simmons (the butler) informed me that an elderly party who didn't give her name was waiting for me in the drawing-room, and I went down, and saw a very tall old woman standing in the room, badly dressed; she might have been a broomstick dressed up for a scarecrow, with a wooden face, for all the expression or figure she had. Well, you know, *we* have no shabby genteel acquaintances on our visiting-list, so I supposed she was come begging for some charity, and I took out my purse at once ready to help her."

"Just like you, mamma," said Alice, "always ready and willing to do a kind action!"

Mrs. Andrews answered her daughter's compliment by a resounding kiss, most heartily given and smilingly received.

"And to go on with my story, children—she didn't want money, and I don't know even now what she did want! She described the carriage and horses and both of you to the life, and then denounced you solemnly!"

"How strange!" said Alice.

"It seems to me, mother, that the only moral to be gathered from the story is this: *Never admit elderly females, or anyone else, who does not give his or her name*; and I will go and give Simmons orders to that effect," said Randolph Andrews as he sauntered from the room.

CHAPTER IX.

MISS ANSELL'S LETTER.

THE outraged spinster rushed home, satisfied that she had at last found out the mystery which had enshrouded the death of George Grafton's wife. She had but little knowledge of vice, but believed the world to be full of it. Often and often she had brooded over the events of three years ago, until

the most simple facts became distorted to her mind, and now she had come accidentally upon the sliding panel, which it was her duty to push back boldly, and expose the crime in all its blackness to the world. She knew of George Grafton's second marriage, and condemned him for it. Marriage at all, under the most favourable circumstances, she disapproved of ; but for a man or woman to marry twice, was a fault not to be overlooked. She thought George Grafton a reprobate, and worthy of no consideration at her hands. So she wrote the bare naked truth, as she believed it to be ; her letter ran thus :

"DEAR SIR, — You will possibly remember (unless your mind is too much occupied with the cares of a second wife) that when my niece died suddenly, I considered the circumstances surrounding her death peculiar and suspicious, and that I had them investigated fully. I did my duty, and had to rest satisfied that I had laboured under a mistake ; but often since then my mind has misgiven me, and I have feared that after all there lay some deep hidden mystery in the affair ; and now I write to inform you that my forebodings

were correct. I have left my old neighbourhood, and am now residing near Maidenhead-on-Thames. While in the town to-day, I saw your wife driving *with* Dr. Cartland ! they did not see me, and I need not say that I have no wish to renew their acquaintance. I considered it, however, to be my duty to trace them, and I called a policeman who informed me that it was Mr. Andrews' carriage, and that he lived at Fair Lawn. I had no difficulty in finding the place, and went in unannounced ; that is, I gave no name. The inside of the house stamped it as the abode of iniquity. A painted Jezebel received me ; she called herself Mrs. Andrews, no doubt your wife does the same. I suppose it is one of those dreadful Mormonite establishments which that horrible Dr. Cartland keeps here, regardless of the laws of the land ; but what can you expect from an unbeliever ? George Grafton ! I have done *my* duty, it is now for you to do *yours*. I have found your wicked wife, it is for you to expose and punish her. I did not see her, as the painted woman said she was out, but I described her and the man, and saw by her face that I had made no mistake.

“ Yours truly,

“ MARIA ANSELL.”

When George Grafton received this letter his indignation knew no' bounds. This hard wicked old woman had seen someone like his darling Kate (his darling still, though dead—though replaced by another—yet she was his heart's one and only love still, and must ever so remain), had chosen to imagine it was her, and Heaven only knew what steps the interfering old wretch might take, bringing scandal upon the woman in her grave.

"I must go to England at once, and prove to the old idiot that she has made a mistake—a cruel dastardly mistake. My poor girl! my beloved wife! that such a slander should be named in the same breath with you. Kate, Kate, I am faithful to you still, although I needs must cherish the little creature washed up by the sea for me to take care of. My poor little Beryl, she will not like to part from me, and yet she cannot come now; but the baby will keep her from fretting after me. May God bless my boy, my first-born, and his mother, little sunbeam that she has been in my dark days. I grieve to leave them both, but my first duty is to Kate."

He left the room and the house, and went straight to the doctor's.

Dr. Mills looked up, startled at the pale stern face before him.

George had not for a moment believed in the accusation against his dead wife ; but that letter seemed to have raised the devil in him. He was impatient to be off, to disprove the foul lie against his dead love.

"Nothing the matter at home, I hope, Grafton?"

"Nothing in the way you mean, Mills ; but there is a great deal the matter with me. To doctors and lawyers one may tell one's secrets without fear of being betrayed. May one not?"

"To some," answered Dr. Mills, with a smile ; "but don't put too much trust in either."

"You, at any rate, are a good fellow, Mills, and I can, and *will* trust you. You know Cartland, do you not?"

"Of course I do."

"Then tell me what you think of him?"

"Oh!" said Dr. Mills, "my dear fellow, if you want an opinion you must go to the other trustworthy profession, and for six and eightpence you will get just the reverse opinion to what you want, whatever it may be!"

Even in Ceylon people had heard of Mrs.

Grafton's mysterious death, and that Dr. Cartland's name had been unpleasantly mixed up with it. So Dr. Mills was not very anxious to express his real opinion of the man to that woman's husband, as it was by no means flattering to the noble doctor.

George Grafton placed the letter he had just received in the hands of the medical man.

"Read that Mills, and tell me what I ought to do."

The other read it through attentively—he did not tell George his thoughts, for he believed in Miss Ansell's vision, had always considered Mrs. Grafton's death a most extraordinary affair, and now he was far from anxious to enter upon the subject with George. He put the letter back into the envelope, and laid his hand on George's shoulder affectionately.

"It is a painful letter for you to receive, Grafton, but my advice to you is to try and think no more about it, and not even to answer the letter of this disagreeable meddler in your affairs."

"But, my dear Mills, I must go and clear my wife's name from this slander. I must prove her innocence."

"Innocence is its own advocate, Grafton. You have another wife to consider now, as sweet a wife as God ever blessed a man with, and a son ; your duty is to take care of them, not to run the world over disproving statements (which no one will believe) of a crazy old woman. Surely Grafton you are too sensible to go off on such a wild-goose chase! You must remember these are not the days of trap doors, sliding panels, and mysterious disappearances."

"I never thought they were," said George, smiling in spite of himself. "You don't think I believe these lies against the truest woman God ever made, nor have I any reason to believe Harry Cartland to be anything but a man of honour. We were college friends, and he was a wild lad ; but since we have renewed our acquaintance I have found him a staid, quiet man."

"Under these circumstances, my dear Grafton, have the sense to remain by your wife's side, that is your right place now," said Dr. Mills.

And George left him, silent but unconvinced. After wandering aimlessly about, he suddenly turned his steps homewards, and went to his wife's room. What a picture met his eye. A fair head,

with waving, rippling hair, falling on a snowy pillow, a pale sweet face bending over a rosy one-week-old babe, which was nestling in her caressing arms, safely clutched by two tiny fragile little hands, which peeped out from the ruffled sleeves of her wrapper, and then the face was raised to his, brimming over with wifely, motherly love.

"Come, George, and help me to find out the colour of baby's eyes; are they like yours or mine? Oh! I do hope they will be like yours, George."

He stooped and kissed the mother and child.

"I wish I were an artist, my little Beryl, I should just paint you as the Madonna and Child, You can't tell how lovely a picture you two are together."

"Oh George! I *am* so proud, so happy," cried out this child—wife—mother—and then, with love's intuition, she looked at him more closely, and the joy faded out of her face.

"Husband!" she said, in a pleading tone, reaching out her little hand, "something is the matter; tell me what it is."

"Nothing, dearest."

"George, I know better; do you think your words can deceive me, when I know every expression of your face by heart? Something has troubled you deeply, dear; you think to spare me, but, believe me, I shall suffer more if you keep me in the dark. Trust me, husband, you will find I can be very brave."

George sat down by the bedside, and rested his aching head upon his wife's pillow, in silence; and after a while began. "You have guessed rightly, Beryl, darling, I *am* in trouble, and I will explain it to you as far as I am able to do so. You will not mind my talking of Kate, little one? You know I love you, dear, but you also know how devotedly I loved my first wife?"

"Yes, yes, I know!" murmured Beryl, with a trembling lip. "It is quite natural, George; I do not mind."

The spirit of the small creature was brave; but the eyes, bright with unshed tears, rather belied the words.

"If anyone slandered you, my Beryl, what do you think I ought to do? What do you think I should do?"

"You would defend your wife, I know, George," answered she with a happy smile.

"Yes, dear, and punish the person who had wronged you."

"No, George, not if they were sorry for it ; we would both forgive them, dear, knowing that we ourselves need so much forgiveness."

"My precious, gentle little wife ! You are right, darling, not if they were sorry—we would, as you say, forgive them if they repented of their sin."

"But, George dear, what has anyone said against me ?"

"Against you, my child ? The slander has been against my Kate—against my first wife."

And a shadow of pain crossed his brow. Beryl sat upright and looked at him.

"No, George, no, there must be some mistake ; the worst person living would not slander the dead !"

She looked now unlike the gentle girl who wished to forgive her enemies ; it seemed to her true nature that to malign those who had no power to defend their good names, but had gone to answer before a higher tribunal than that of man, was a sacrilege—an impossible, unforgivable sin.

A sad smile was all his answer.

"What!" she cried, "someone has really spoken evil lately of your—of Kate?"

She could not call her his wife, even now.

"Yes, dear Beryl, someone has invented the most horrible, cruel, dastardly lies against her. Now, tell me what I ought to do. I ought not to sit still and hear it, little one, ought I, when she cannot defend herself?"

Beryl turned very pale, but put her hand into his.

"I cannot advise you, George, for you are far wiser than I am; but do not consider *me* if you think you have any duty to perform to her."

"God bless you, my wife," cried George Grafton, catching her to his breast. "You are a noble brave little woman, Beryl. I love you, I am proud of you; what other woman would have been so unselfish? I do think I have a duty to perform, I will go to England and clear that poor girl's name, and I will soon be back with my blessed little wife here. Oh child!" he cried passionately, "if any evil were to befall you through me it would break my heart, my pure dove;" and he smoothed the fair disordered tresses of silky hair, as they lay

negligently on the pillow, nestling about her slender throat.

"What evil can befall your wife, George?" she asked, with a happy, contented smile.

"God grant none, my dearest, but I am full of forebodings of evil," he answered gloomily; and then, as if determined to shake it off, he smiled, and said: "You ought to be flattered, little one, that the prospect of leaving you for a few short weeks should take the pluck out of me like this; and I am very wrong to worry you thus; I hope you won't miss me very much, dear," he added lovingly, "you will have my son to take care of you in my absence."

"God bless our child!" said the mother, drawing him more closely to her, and stooping to kiss his infant lips.

"Amen!" answered George to her petition.

After a while, she said: "When shall you go, husband?"

"I don't know, Beryl, but by the very first steamer."

"Because," she continued, "I should like baby to be christened before you do."

"Very well, wife of mine, you shall have your

wish. I will go at once and ask Mr. Summers to baptise the boy before I start ;” and he rose to go.

“George,” said Beryl, “you have not told me what has been said against her, against Kate, you know.”

He was going towards the door, but stopped suddenly and looked at her, all the colour gone from his face. With her words there flashed upon his mind the consequences that such an accusation proved would have upon her, his present wife ; if that were true, not his wife at all, and then he cast the thought out of his mind as if it had been a poisonous reptile.

“No, Beryl,” he answered, “I cannot tell you what it is ; it is not fit for your pure ears to listen to, your pure heart to ponder over. Beryl !” he cried, with subdued passion, “I would sooner die than that you should know and realise such a story as I have been told about poor Kate ;” and he turned and left the room without another word.

CHAPTER X.

GEORGE SEES A GHOST.

BABY GEORGE was made a Christian of, and a tender parting had taken place between George Grafton and his wife. She kept up a brave spirit till the last—till the last sound of the wheels had died in the distance, which were carrying from her what she loved best in the world ; and then she gave way to her grief. She never thought him unkind to leave her, never tried to persuade him not to go ; he had told her it was his duty, and Beryl was the last little woman in the world to wish to stand in the way of that. She said no more about the nature of the slander against the first Mrs. Grafton ; but she very often wondered about it, framing what she thought dreadful things, that someone might have invented, though never in her innocence coming near to the black truth. But George's earnestness, George's words were for ever presenting themselves before her. "He would sooner die than that she should realise such a story!" Poor George. How tender he was over her, and her wifely heart sang anthems

of praise for the gift of such a husband as George Grafton!

So days and weeks passed on, and George had reached England, and had seen Miss Ansell. From her house he walked straight to Fair Lawn, sent in his card, and was admitted to the sanctuary of mirrors, golden damask, and statuettes. He could not help smiling as he cast his eyes around the gorgeous room, remembering the anathemas he had just heard hurled upon it by Miss Ansell's christian lips; upon it, and the house, and all that dwelt therein. He could understand that Miss Ansell would be horrified, though to him, the undraped Venuses being only works of art, he could look at them with pleasure, each being perfect of its kind.

While he was gazing at a reclining Venus in a looking-glass stand, the door opened, and George turned round. A cry escaped his lips! "Kate!" he cried, in an agonised voice, and sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

The girl looked very much alarmed, and made her escape from the room.

"Another mad person!" she exclaimed, as she rushed into her mother's boudoir. "Oh mamma!

I will never go and receive strange visitors for you again ! ”

“ Why, good gracious me ! what has happened, child ? ” asked Mrs. Andrews, struggling into a rich green silk dress.

“ Mother ! ” cried Alice, “ there’s a madman in the drawing-room.”

“ Lor ! there must be an asylum let loose ! Oh dear ! I wish your pa was at home, or Randolph.”

“ Be quick, mamma, for the man’s ill as well as mad ! I was afraid to stay by myself ; but I’ll go back with you.”

“ And we will tell Simmons to wait outside the door,” said the mother.

In the meantime, the deadly faintness that had seized upon George, as he saw a tall, dark, graceful girl, dressed in white piqué, with a bunch of crimson roses at her breast, enter the room, passed away ; and he looked up to find that he was alone.

“ Good God ! ” he groaned ; “ was it a delusion of my excited fancy ? did my brain call up a picture of my dead wife, as I used to see her, that happy summer-time, three years ago ? Has no

one been into the room after all ? ” He wiped the drops of agony from his brow, his hands were cold as clay. If that were Kate ! what, what was she now. And Beryl, and the child—what of them ? “ Oh God ! ” he cried, “ deliver me from this ghastly fancy ; it cannot be real ! ”

Again the door opened, and a lady appeared, who in a moment he recognised as Miss Ansell’s “ painted Jezebel ; ” yet she was *not* painted. Nature had blessed Mrs. Andrews with an all-powerful colour ; which that good lady had endeavoured to soften down with an unlimited supply of violet powder ! George felt relieved, as he looked at her ; he saw at once that vanity and vulgarity were the greatest sins that the stout lady had to answer for. Alice, walking in her mother’s shadow, was at first invisible through Mrs. Andrew’s bulk. He started, as she once more appeared. They had now come close to him.

“ Mr. George Grafton,” said Mrs. Andrews, looking at his card ; “ I don’t think I have had the pleasure of hearing the name before.”

George had never taken his eyes off Alice’s face.

Mrs. Andrews made a gesture of introduction. "My daughter, Miss Alice Andrews," she said grandly, with a majestic sweep of the arm.

An expression of inexpressible relief passed across his face. George Grafton was himself again! Not only had Mrs. Andrews' words lifted a weight from his heart, but on close examination he found the likeness to his dead wife in this girl before him, though great, was not nearly so great as his excited imagination had supposed. Her face was not as perfect in features as Kate's had been; still they were alike enough to have been sisters—quite.

"Mrs. Andrews," said George, "I must ask your pardon for my peculiar behaviour to your daughter, but her extraordinary likeness to a dear wife whom I lost three years ago, must be my plea for your forgiveness."

There could not be a kinder-hearted woman than Mrs. Andrews; and an honest tear twinkled in her eye as she stretched out her hand to George, thereby offering him her friendship.

"Oh Mr. Grafton, don't worry your head about that! you frightened Alice a little, but she'll get over it. I am sorry you have had your troubles; so young too, and so gentlemanly—

looking. I've quite taken a fancy to you, Mr. Grafton, and I hope we shall be friends ; but I can't help laughing, for Alice took you for a lunatic !” and the worthy woman gave way to an uncontrollable fit of laughter and shaking ; “and only to think,” she continued, “we've got Simmons outside the door, now (that's the butler, you know), to protect us if you proved dangerous !” and Mrs. Andrews laughed again, shaking like an animated rouge mange !

Alice coloured.

“You must excuse my thinking so, you know, as you were peculiar ; and we had a fright from a mad woman, about a couple of months ago.”

“Yes,” said George, “she wrote to me, and told me that my wife's death was an imposture, and that I should find her here. My dear Kate died while I was in Ceylon, just a year after our marriage. You may imagine, Miss Andrews, when you came into the room, looking so like her, dressed in her favourite costume of white, and crimson roses, how you startled me !”

“I am so sorry,” said Alice sympathetically.

“Why, it's quite a romance !” said Mrs. Andrews, smoothing down the green silk with a caressing

hand. "And now you've come to England to look for another wife, I suppose, Mr. Grafton?" she asked, while her eyes rested on her daughter's handsome face.

"No! on the contrary, I have married again, which made the idea of my first wife being alive a doubly serious matter to me."

"Only to think of that!" cried Mrs. Andrews. "You thought you had committed bigamy! No wonder you were frightened at our Alice, when you thought she was your first wife come back to accuse you of your falseness!"

"No, Mrs. Andrews, no thoughts of myself were in my mind when I saw your daughter. If you knew how I loved Kate, you would understand it better."

"Kate?" said Mrs. Andrews; "was that number one, or number two?"

"Kate was my first wife's name; my present wife is called Beryl."

"Present wife," laughed the stout lady; "that sounds as if you were going to have half-a-dozen more!"

George looked serious, and Alice was quick to perceive it.

"Beryl!" she said, "I never heard that name before; how pretty it is. I feel sure anyone owning it must be very charming."

"My little Beryl is an angel, Miss Andrews. I should like you to know each other very much; you are so like the one I loved best on earth, that I know you must be all that is good, and I wish I could insure your friendship for my wife, who is quite a child."

"You are right there, Mr. Grafton," said the proud mother. "Alice is as good a girl as ever stepped in shoe-leather; not one of your district-visiting sort, who pretends to be in love with every dirty child she sees, and to enjoy the smell of poverty that you find in squalid cottages, and the chance of bringing home more than you took out! Alice is too refined for that sort of goodness; but she doesn't spare her pocket-money, if she knows a poor person is in want; and she works at her needle for them like a lady, and makes them clothes."

Alice looked up. "I wanted to have a district, but mamma would not hear of it; and she gave me such a graphic description of all I should have to go through, that she quite horrified me. The poor must live in a dreadful state."

George looked at her kindly.

"And how are they to learn better, Miss Andrews, if no one will teach them?"

"Then you approve of ladies taking districts?"

"Certainly I do. It is the sick who need a physician, not the healthy; the ignorant who require teaching, not the learned."

"Come, come, Mr. Grafton, please not to put such ideas in Alice's head. I have only one daughter, and I don't want to see her die of scarlet fever or smallpox, which she is sure to take, having had neither. No, no, Alice; give away as much money as you like, but give it with the tongs, as one may say. If you hadn't got money to give, I'd say nothing; but your money does them more good than your words, I'll warrant; and if you want to teach religion I'll send for as many bibles as you like, and one of the gardeners shall go round with them. Not one of the indoor servants, for fear they should bring home anything. The fear of infection, and insects, is the terror of my life, Mr. Grafton," she ended pathetically.

George and Alice both smiled. How like Kate she was. It gave him quite a painful pleasure to be near her.

"Mrs. Andrews, I am trespassing too much on your time, I fear."

"Not a bit of it, go home and dress yourself, and share our dinner. Randolph is going to bring a stranger home this evening; someone he knew when he was at Oxford. Randolph is my son, you know; and then you will meet Mr. Andrews too. He's not much to look at, is he, Alice? But he's a good hand at making a fortune; and he's an honest man. Randolph looks down on his father; but for all that he's been a good father to him, and never denied him anything in his life; but then, you know, Randolph has been at the university, and is rather a swell!"

George had been going to refuse the invitation, but he feared lest he should be supposed to look down on the absent Mr. Andrews, so he said kindly:

"I shall be very pleased to make your husband's acquaintance, Mrs. Andrews. Every honest man has a charm for me, and I feel sure I shall like Mr. Andrews," and he held out his hand to say good-bye.

"Well, *au 'revor*," said she; "we dine at seven to the moment; no grace allowed, Mr. Grafton!"

"I will be punctual," laughed George, as his eyes rested once again on Alice's face.

George returned to Miss Ansell, and told her of her mistake. A great weight had been lifted off his mind, his spirits were elated, he felt as if he walked on air. There was nothing against his darling Kate, nothing to come between him and Beryl, nothing to break her faithful heart, and take away his son's very name. And George was thankful, very thankful, and very happy. He would go back to his little wife and small son, as quickly as possible, only running down first to see his father and mother. He sat down and wrote to Beryl a joyous letter—the last she ever had from him—full of love and brightness, over which she laughed and cried by turns; inexpressibly happy that the shadow had passed out of his life, that she should see him again so soon. He was coming back, he said, as fast as steam could carry him!

And Beryl was happy, telling her joy in broken words to the babe upon her knee, who threw up his small arms at his mother's voice, as if he understood her words.

George Grafton spent a pleasant evening with the

Andrewses. Randolph condescendingly patronised him, the old man gave him a hearty, H-less, welcome. Alice liked and admired him, and Mrs. Andrews patted him affectionately on the back.

The stranger collegian was a slight acquaintance of his own ; had joined the university about the time he had left, not even at the same college ; still they were acquaintances, and both had known Harry Cartland in those old days.

"By-the-bye, Grafton, do you remember a man at Oxford named Cartland ?"

"Yes," said George ; "he and I were at the same college."

"Poor devil !" continued he. "He has come very suddenly to the end of his tether. Cartland has had a short life and a merry one !"

George Grafton looked very grave.

"Poor Cartland ! dead, is he ?"

"Well, not actually dead ; at least, I have not seen it in *The Times*, but he is given over."

"Poor Cartland ! We were friends, and his approaching death is a shock to me."

"Wild dog," continued the other. "Some story about his murdering some other man's wife about three years ago."

The evening was over for George. So there had been such talk as that about his wife—well, it was time to say good-bye, and he said it, amidst a running accompaniment of regrets from his hosts and hostesses.

A dull sense of pain went with him to his hotel, and continued all night, mocking the elasticity which had defied trouble all the day through, since his interview at Fair Lawn with Mrs. Andrews and her daughter. He felt angry with Dr. Cartland, then angry with himself for his want of feeling for the dying man. How could he help the scandals got up by the world against Kate; or, indeed, were they not against the man himself? He would go to London and call upon him, and shake his hand once more in this world. Having made up his mind he was anxious to be off at once, and rose early for his start. London reached, he hailed a hansom cab, and drove straight to Dr. Cartland's door. The hall-porter was a stranger to George Grafton.

"Dr. Cartland had been out of town for these two months and more. He could not give his address—believed he was living near Windsor. All letters were addressed to the Windsor Post-

office, to be called for. The practice was sold to Dr. Duval, who was at home then. Would the gentleman see him instead?" "Yes—George Grafton would. No—he would not send in his card." Dr. Duval would see the gentleman at once. The practice had fallen off in Dr. Cartland's hands after the *talk* about Mrs. Grafton; the ladies became afraid of him, and he was less sought after. Dr. Duval was *not* a favourite with anyone. He looked like a foreigner, but spoke good English. No one seemed to know anything of him until he came into Dr. Cartland's business."

George was shown in; the two men bowed. George was the first to speak.

"You are Dr. Cartland's successor, I believe?"

"Yes; what can I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

"I shall be much obliged if you will give me Cartland's address," said George.

Dr. Duval eyed him keenly.

"You forget, sir, that you are a stranger to me."

"True," answered George, "but I am a friend of Cartland's. We were at college together, and now I hear that he is ill."

"Very ill—in fact, dying," said Duval.

"Do you attend him?"

"I do."

"Then undoubtedly you can give me his address."

"Undoubtedly I could," said he coolly; "but Cartland is a friend of mine, and I see no reason for telling his whereabouts to everyone who may ask for it."

"But why not?" said George, greatly astonished.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Does a dying man want visitors?"

"Then you won't tell me where he lives?"

"Exactly so!" answered Dr. Duval, with an amused smile.

George thought for a few moments, and then took out his card and handed it to the other.

"You must have heard of me if Cartland is a friend of yours. As a stranger, you will not assist me, I see, but as a mutual acquaintance of the same man you can hardly withhold such a small civility."

Dr. Duval looked at the card, and even his masklike face underwent a change, and George noticed it.

"I see you have heard of me," he said.

Dr. Duval seemed uncertain what course to steer, and then, after a pause, answered :

"Yes—I see no reason for denying that I have met with the name before. I was called in to see a lady of the name of Grafton about three years since who was dying, and it seemed to me a sad case, for she was all alone—no one with her but her medical attendant."

George's lips trembled. Here then was another witness to poor Kate's death.

"I am that lady's husband," he answered.

"Good God!" exclaimed the doctor, surprised out of himself. "I thought you had died abroad, been lost at sea, or something of that sort ; I am sure I heard so."

"Did Cartland tell you so?" asked George sternly.

"I am not prepared to say ; one hears a great many things without being able to remember who was the originator of a report. People will say anything, Mr. Grafton. I actually heard some say they had seen your wife within the last twelve-month, yet I saw her die!"

George turned clay cold.

"Who said it?" he asked, with suppressed passion. "If it be a man I will break every bone in his body!"

Dr. Duval smiled, and again shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear sir, you have lived some time abroad; you must have forgotten the ways of the world. It is impossible to trace these little on dits."

"Then I will make you responsible for them," said George sternly. "No one shall say or repeat anything against my dead wife if I can help it."

Dr. Duval looked at his watch.

"I am always sorry to part with pleasant society, Mr. Grafton, but a medical man's time is not at his own disposal. I must wish you good-morning;" and before George could stop him he had passed through a mysterious door which was papered over, and had not been noticed by George before, and was gone.

George Grafton tried the handle, but the door had evidently shut with a noiseless spring, and before he could gather up his scattered senses a servant entered the room to show him out, and he had nothing to do but to go. On and on he walked,

and entered St. James's Park, and at last stopped by the ornamental waters and sat down.

The walks were utterly deserted—the shuttered windows of the London houses seemed to bespeak a dead world. If any human beings were alive in those mansions, they must have lived in the back rooms for the sake of appearance; for who would be in London in September?

A dreadful weight was on George Grafton's heart and spirits. He seemed lost in the shadow of a dark and unknown evil. For hours he sat looking into the still waters, with a terrible longing to find rest in them from the nameless horror that was upon him, a longing which he put from him impatiently.

"My mind must be upset," he said aloud, not noticing a policeman who was standing behind him listening to his words. "What do I imagine? what are my fears? I cannot tell; and yet I seem driven on to some unknown misery. Why cannot I be content to go back to my wife and child, and find happiness, instead of prowling about England in search of a mystery which probably does not exist? I wish I had followed Mills's advice, and never come over on this wild-goose chase. Just

when I thought I was free to go home, this Dr. Duval arouses fresh doubts in my mind ; and yet, what did he say to do so ? He declined to give me Cartland's address. Why should he do so ? that is what I have to find out next."

The policeman scented business, and walked round him so as to get a good view of his face.

"Windsor Post Office !" cried George, starting from his seat. "That is where I must go," and he made off across the park.

The policeman watched the retreating form, muttering to himself that he expected he should see that gent again ; and straightway pulled out a little note-book and entered the words he had heard George speak on a blank page, which he headed "A Mystery ;" and, very much satisfied with his own acuteness, he "moved on" to look for other interesting matters.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GREAT MYSTERY.

DR. CARTLAND was very fast approaching the Valley of the Shadow of Death, but his dying hours were cheered by a loving woman's devotion. She was seldom away from his bedside. Night and day she smoothed his pillow, raising the emaciated form in her strong white arms, and resting the weary head upon her breast. The sick man's eyes would rest upon her full of gratitude and love, and he would kiss the hand that ministered to his wants.

"My darling," he said, "I shall soon know the Great Mystery!"

Large dark circles surrounded the beautiful eyes of the girl he addressed, and spoke of nights of weary watching; and the agonised expression of those orbs told a tale of suffering enough to melt a heart of stone.

"Oh Harry!" she cried, burying her face in his bedclothes; "oh Harry! do not leave me. I have no one—no one but you. Let us call in fresh advice; surely among all the clever men in London

someone could be found to cure you. Oh! why—*why* must I lose you?"

He lifted his feeble hand with difficulty, and stroked her glossy dark head.

"No one can cure me, my darling; my hours are numbered."

The girl sobbed piteously.

"Why, darling, it is not often you give way," he continued. "Be brave still, for my sake. Oh love, when I think of all you are to me, all you have done for me, I find it very hard to die, little one. In the days to come, if you ever feel inclined to blame the dead man, remember that you were his one and only love!"

She nestled closely to him, but answered by no word. He seemed exhausted from the effect of talking, but soon renewed the conversation.

"In after-life, love, if you find I have deceived you, could you forgive me?"

"Forgive you, Harry—what could I not forgive?" cried the heart-broken girl. "You know I would give my life for you, my love—oh my love!"

"I shall die happier for that promise, wife," he said, with a faint smile. "I have kept but one

secret from you. You will know it when I am gone. I have written to you, and you will open the letter after I am buried—not before.”

Choking sobs alone told him that she heard him.

“I have not behaved well to you, love, but you have promised to forgive me. But, darling,” he said, almost raising himself in his earnestness, “never doubt *one* thing, that my love for you was the one true and pure feeling of my life ; that I die loving you in death, as I have loved you in life ; and if I were not an unbeliever, I should hope to renew that love hereafter. Dear love, can there be any meeting again for us? you who are a true Christian—I an unbeliever. The one honest feeling of my life has been my love for you, and that a good man would count unholy, a thing to be repented of, and I cannot repent of it. Oh my darling, my more than wife, I glory in it ! If I believed in God, I would thank Him for these three years of perfect happiness, and ask Him to give you back to me in another world ; but as a man lives so must he die. It is too late to change now. I have lived an unbeliever ; I must die an unbeliever,” and he sank down on his pillow exhausted.

"Harry," whispered the girl gently, "we have both sinned, but the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. For His sake we shall be forgiven."

She rested her pale cheek upon his thin hand lovingly, and thus they remained silently for a long while, and then he looked at her sad and weary face.

"My darling, you are worn out ; you will not distress me, love, but will go and rest for a couple of hours."

"Don't send me away, Harry," she pleaded.

"My wife, I must insist ; I will have one of the servants to sit with me, but rest you must have, and now, or you will break down ; kiss me, love, and go."

The girl rose wearily, and kissed him passionately, and then left the room with heavy listless steps, and in a few moments more a man-servant entered.

Harry Cartland would have no woman save his wife in his room.

"What time is it, Stevens ?" he inquired of the man.

"Three, sir !"

"Have the letters come ?"

"I will see, sir," and presently he re-entered with several on a salver.

Dr. Cartland had written to London to his lawyer, and here was an answer from him, to say he would be with him at "three thirty," and then the sick man glanced through his other letters, and lay back on his pillow to rest.

"I shall want pens and ink ready, Stephens, and my desk. I am expecting a gentleman presently; you can leave when he comes. Draw up the blinds, and let me look at the light of the day," he added languidly.

For the last month he had been too weak to walk upstairs, so a room had been arranged for him upon the ground-floor—a pretty room, draped with delicate cretonne, a room in which every detail showed a lady's hand; flowers from the lovely garden were arranged here and there, nothing was forgotten that the sick man liked. The French windows opened upon a soft, green, well-kept lawn; roses peeped in round the window-sills, while clematis hung festooned about the top. Willows bowed their weeping branches to the gentle breeze, kissing the water as it rippled past. The cottage in which Dr. Cartland was living, was called The

Nook. It was close to the Thames, but lay back in a pretty little winding backwater, so that it could scarcely be seen at all by the passers-by on the river. It was hidden too by the luxuriant shrubs and trees by which it was surrounded, disclosing nothing but a few chimneys and gables to the world. It lay in from the main-road also, having green fields stretching as far as eye could range, and gates up the carriage-drive to the house—an isolated place although in the midst of habitations.

This was the home to which Harry Cartland brought the woman of his love—the wife of his heart, nearly three years since.

About noon this day (the day on which Harry Cartland was expecting his lawyer), a gentleman walked into the General Post-office at Windsor, and asked for Dr. Cartland's address; each official referred him to another, not knowing it, till he found himself before the postmaster, who was intensely civil, also intensely ignorant as to what he wanted to know.

The inquirer was George Grafton. He repeated again his question, patiently, having asked it some half-dozen times before.

"Could the postmaster give him Dr. Cartland's address?"

"No!" the postmaster "regretted very much he could not oblige him. Dr. Cartland lived a long distance from any post-office—somewhere up the river—and always sent to Windsor twice a week at least for his letters. Mrs. Cartland had been for them herself more than once, and a sweet-looking lady she was; would make a most lovely widow! for the poor doctor was on his death-bed, and indeed to-day was the day for fetching the letters; if the gentleman wished to send any message, he would take care it was delivered to the groom, who always, at least generally, rode over."

"No, George would not send a message; he would look out for the man;" and Fate helped him, for as he turned to leave the office he felt a mysterious tap on his shoulder, and there stood the postmaster by his side.

"There! that's Dr. Cartland's groom, sir, dismounting at The White Hart," he whispered confidentially.

"Always glad to oblige, sir," said the man, in answer to George's thanks.

George Grafton crossed to the hotel-yard, where the man had led in the horse.

So Harry Cartland was married, and he had never heard of it, and now his wife would be a pretty widow !

"Poor Cartland !" and that was all the world said or thought about the affair.

He walked up to the groom, and asked whether Dr. Cartland was any better.

The man shook his head.

"No, sir, nor never will be in this world ; he's took to his bed now, poor fellow, and he'll never get up no more, and missus is just heart-broken."

"I am very sorry indeed," answered George. "How long has your master been married ?"

"Don't know, sir, at all. I have only been with him a year, and I never thought to ask ; but they seem to be all in all to each other, as the saying is."

"Ah !" said George Grafton. "Well, I am going over to see Dr. Cartland this afternoon, and am not sure of the address ; be good enough to give it to me !"

The request, being accompanied by half-a-crown, was acceded to at once, and the groom,

having got the letters, rode off again at a brisk trot for The Nook, and mentioned faithfully to his master's man, his meeting with the gentleman at Windsor.

So when Stevens heard that Dr. Cartland was expecting his lawyer, he put two and two together, deciding that they were one and the same person.

The bell rang and Stevens went out of the bed-chamber to usher in the stranger, and as he closed the door he was puzzled by hearing his master exclaim :

"Grafton! Grafton! is it really you? you in the flesh?"

George walked up to the bedside, and took his wasted hand in his.

"Don't!" cried the sick man, shrinking back; "I have injured you."

George looked at his hollow cheeks, and saw he was in no state to be agitated.

"Say you forgive me, George, and I shall die happy! What brought you here? I thought you were out there in Ceylon, married and happy."

"I heard some rumours of Kate's not being really dead, Cartland, and I came to England at once."

The sick man's face grew ghastly as he listened ; death seemed to be coming upon him ; he clutched the bedclothes between his clammy hands convulsively.

"I have seen Dr. Duval," continued George, "and he tells me he was with her when she died, so it is impossible for me to doubt any longer. So you are married, Cartland ! Good God ! what is the matter ?" for the sick man had fainted.

George rang the bell, and the faithful Stevens entered the room.

He looked reproachfully at George.

"You might have seen he was in no state to talk to or be agitated," he said roughly ; "but some folks have no feelings for others ; poor master !" and he set to work at once to try and bring his master back to consciousness.

He chafed the thin hands, held salts to his nostrils, and wetted his lips with brandy.

Blood oozed from his mouth.

"Had you not better fetch Mrs. Cartland ?" said George.

"I think not sir," said the man ; "and if you will take my advice you will go before he comes-to."

Just at this juncture the lawyer, whom Dr. Cartland had expected, entered the room, and the gentlemen mutually inclined their heads, neither knowing who the other was.

The dying man once more opened his eyes, and looked with a scared gesture around him.

"You here still, George!" he groaned. "You told me you forgave me. Why, why, don't you go? What was it Kate said? 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin?'"

"Amen!" said George Grafton. "Were those *her* last words?"

Harry Cartland's head had been wandering, he now looked at George as if he did not fully comprehend.

"The last words she spoke, before she died, poor girl, I mean," explained George.

Dr. Cartland groaned.

"Grafton, I have written you a long letter. In that I have told you all there is to tell with reference to Kate. I have not the strength to talk to you now—in pity leave me. You will not have long to wait," he added, with a sickly smile; "give your address to my good lawyer here, and the day I am buried he will deliver my letter to you

in person, and help you like a true friend in the difficulties I have brought upon you."

The lawyer here whispered to George his advice to leave the room, and George Grafton's and Harry Cartland's hands clasped for the last time. The men parted in silence, and when George Grafton quitted the room Stevens went with him, and Dr. Cartland and his lawyer were left alone. He pointed to his desk.

"In there you will find my will," he gasped, "all my papers of importance, and some letters, which are to be delivered the day of my burial. When you have looked over them all you will find that there has been a mystery in my life, and I want you to know that Mrs. Cartland was not a party to the deception I practised. Remember this, as the last words of a dying man, and be a friend to her, Saunders."

"I will," answered the man of law; "I promise to befriend your wife."

Dr. Cartland turned to him with a gesture as if on the point of making a disclosure, and then sank back.

"Not while I live," he murmured. "You will all know the worst soon enough—it won't be long."

The door opened softly, as a pale girl entered with gentle footsteps.

"Shall I be in the way?" she asked, with a sad smile.

"Is that you, darling?" said Dr. Cartland, the light of love illuminating his dying eyes; "I hoped you were sleeping, dear love."

"I could not sleep, husband. I dozed once, and woke with such a horrible dream; and even after I was awake voices from the dead sounded in my ears. Oh Harry, I heard George's voice so plainly! Oh! what have I done?" she cried. "Husband! husband! speak to me; and you, Mr. Saunders, will you ring for Stevens?"

She had seen Mr. Saunders before—he had come down to witness Dr. Cartland's will with his clerk; but he had said the will was not to be read by anyone, not even by his lawyer, while he lived, and after being duly signed, it was sealed up, and he kept it in his own desk. Mr. Saunders had been touched by Mrs. Cartland's tender devotion to her husband, as well as attracted to her by her beauty, and most willingly he undertook to be her friend. A pleasant, and not difficult task, he thought, to be the friend of a rich and lovely

young widow, especially, being a bachelor himself, with very little interest in life, and only a moderate amount of clients, and therefore only a small income. He was a man with an honest and good heart, which accounted perhaps for his not having got on better; for Sydney Saunders was not fond of dirty work, and would never take the case of a "black lot" in hand. His friends told him he would never get on, he was "too conscientious." His enemies called him a "prig" and a "fool," but Sydney Saunders still continued his usual road, making enough to live on, and none to spare. His thoughts had wandered from his work to Mrs. Cartland and her husband's approaching death. He pictured her in her beauty and loneliness, and sighed to think how little it was in his power to do for her in her sadness, and as was his custom when in thought, he fell to humming to himself—"What will to-morrow bring bring? Who can tell?"—when his office-door opened and admitted George Grafton.

The gentlemen had exchanged addresses the day before in Harry Cartland's bed-chamber.

Mr. Saunders was rather surprised to see his visitor, but received him courteously. George

could hardly explain what he had come for, he knew that the letter which was to tell him something, which he had to forgive, would not be delivered till his old friend was at rest in his last earthly resting-place. Impatience for that time would simply be indecent on his part ; and yet he was impatient—not impatient for the death of the man who had been his friend, but to know what the mystery was that hung over his life and enshrouded the death of the wife he had loved. Through the slowly dragging hours of the night he had, bit by bit, formed theories, only to cast them aside again ; but the last one that had taken possession of his mind seemed possible, and became fixed there.

Perhaps Cartland was aware that he had not called in medical help in time ; he might even know he had mismanaged the case, and that poor Kate had been a victim to his want of care ; anything worse than this must have been found out at the post-mortem. As for Kate being alive, that was simply impossible ; Cartland himself had certified to her death, and Dr. Duval had been in the room when she died, and all at Hazelhurst House had identified her. There was no room for doubt

about any of those facts. But having arrived at this satisfactory conclusion, poor George Grafton found sleep none the more easy to woo, and he tossed restlessly till daylight, and then, having refreshed himself with a cold bath, descended into the unswept hotel among the sleepy unwashed waiters, who were just beginning their day by clearing up, and by noon found himself sitting in Sydney Saunders' office. That worthy man looked at him scrutinisingly.

"You are out of sorts, Mr. Grafton. A hard night, I should say," he added, with a smile.

"A very restless one," said George, "for I never closed my eyes once, and was floundering and gasping for breath all the time, in the middle of a huge feather-bed. The man who invented feather-beds ought to be introduced to the rack or the thumbscrew, for the tortures he has brought on the mass of humanity who have suffered from his invention."

The two men looked at each other, and each acknowledged to himself that the other was an honest man, if appearance went for anything, and as if mutually drawn together they shook hands; and then Mr. Saunders invited George to be seated,

and they fell into talk, during which Sydney had mentioned Dr. Cartland's beautiful wife, and her devotion to her husband—had acknowledged not to have known either of them more than a year and a half—had settled a few little matters of land for Cartland, and had gone down about his will, and had remained there a day or two as guest to the young couple, with whom he was charmed.

"And you don't think there is any mystery about his marriage?"

"None whatever," he answered energetically; and then there flashed across his mind Dr. Cartland's words that there *had* been a mystery in his life; but it could not refer to his marriage, for he had solemnly assured him that Mrs. Cartland had *not* been a party to it; but he turned the subject as quickly as possible, feeling that he was treading on dangerous ground, and asked George to dinner, and he accepted the invitation.

"Bachelors' fare, you know, Grafton, and lodging-house cooking," he said, with a laugh; "so bring a good appetite with you."

When we last saw into Harry Cartland's sick-room, he had fainted at the words his wife had

uttered. But she, and the attentive Stevens soon brought him round again; and Mr. Saunders took his leave, accompanied by the desk which the dying man had placed in his charge.

Then husband and wife were left alone. For the most part they were silent; the silence only broken, now and then, by words of love on either side.

Harry Cartland was sinking fast. All night she watched him in the dimly-lighted room, watched him with dumb agony, tenderly kissing the hands that lay almost passive in her own.

This then was the end of it; her life would cease with his. Not so far as animal existence went, but all that made life worth living for would be gone—nothing but the *husk* would be left to her.

Ah! how she wished that she could give up life with him, that she might be permitted to enter the dark valley by his side. She should not fear the blackest shadows; if she were facing them with *him*. But to remain behind, to meet the cold looks of the world alone; there was no one to whom she could apply for comfort.

By her own act and deed, she had shut herself

out from all her former friends. Even her husband, who loved her more than life, felt this, and would never let her go anywhere, where there was the faintest possibility of recognition. She felt somehow that she was shut out from the world, but she counted the world well lost for love. And love she had—earnest passionate love, strong even in death!

Early next morning Dr. Duval arrived, and after speaking to the sick man, he signed to the poor wife to follow him from the room.

Dr. Duval's manners were generally rough, but as he took Mrs. Cartland's hand in his, and looked at the white face, drawn with care and sorrow, his voice almost shook, as he told her, she must "be prepared for the worst." He told her he would return directly he had seen his patients; he thought her husband might live yet a few hours, but he would not last through another night.

Mrs. Cartland knew it all before, yet it seemed to fall with an overwhelming crushing weight upon her. She staggered, seeing which he took her arm and led her to a chair.

"Try and bear up, for his sake," he said in a low voice. "Death is a hard thing for a man to

face, Mrs. Cartland ; make it as easy to him as you can ; don't let him suffer for you too."

Dr. Duval had struck the right chord. Mrs. Cartland looked up.

"You are right ; thank you for what you have said, Dr. Duval. I will be brave for his sake ; it will be time enough to think of my sorrows when his are over, poor darling."

"You are a noble woman, Mrs. Cartland. I wish there were more in the world like you !"

His words seemed to pain her.

"My only merit is loving my husband, Dr. Duval ; and it is lucky for the world there are not many who love so well. Women without hearts have the best times of it ; they take the happiness out of their lives, grow fat, never weary themselves, and are perfectly contented. And yet," she cried passionately, "I would not give up the glorious happiness of the last three years, for thirty of the ordinary lives of women !" And then she added piteously : "Don't think me rude, but don't detain me, our time is so short together now ; don't keep me from him !"

"One word only, Mrs. Cartland. You will be very ill if you keep up this strain upon

mind and body much longer ; take an hour's rest."

"Not a moment," she cried impatiently, making for the door. "What time will you be back?"

"As soon as possible ; about three or four."

"Then good-bye for the present."

The weary-eyed woman was soon beside her husband's bed again.

"I need not ask what he said to you, love?"

She was silent.

"I know I shall not live out the day. Keep quite close to me, love. I am too feeble to feel for you."

She nestled beside him on the bed.

"That's right, dear love ; I shall now feel your sweet breath on my cheek, the warmth of your dear arms about me. Perhaps I shall sleep a little, love ; don't leave me, no, not for a second."

Sometimes he stirred, and when he did his wife seized the opportunity of giving him his medicine and champagne. He could no longer eat.

Dr. Duval came again, and offered to remain ; but Dr. Cartland shook his head.

"I know what that means, but I would rather die in her arms alone."

"But Cartland, you must think of her; would she not be afraid if you got worse?"

"My blessed wife will not be afraid of me, alive or dead, Duval!"

And she held his death-cold hands, and answered him with a smile.

Dr. Duval shook the dying man's hand.

"So be it then, but I shall not leave the house, and if I am wanted you will know I am on the spot. Good-bye, Cartland. May God give you rest!" and he left the room.

The dying man refused all further nourishment.

"Don't offer me any more, love."

So the wife crept up again beside this one she had loved, who was now passing so quickly away from the reach of her love and tender care, and tried to keep him warm; but the death-chills would not be stopped by human hand.

His mind wandered over his past life, which he referred to in broken words. He talked with horror of a death, and of a funeral; but she did not know of whom he spoke. He was asking George Grafton for his pardon, and then he begged for

hers, till her gentle words recalled him to himself and he would lie quiet ; and then he fell asleep, his head pillowed on her breast. His mind was tortured even in his dreams. At last he sprang up, as if he had regained his strength.

“Come away, Kate !” he cried, “quick, quick, they have discovered the mystery. Say you will never leave me, Kate ! nothing shall part us ! Kate ! you are my wife ; Kate !”

A stream of blood was rushing from his mouth, making his protest against their parting a ghastly mockery.

Mrs. Cartland put out her hand to reach the bell, but there was a look of reproach in her husband’s eyes which she understood. He had recovered from the terror of the dream, which he had been unable to shake off, at first, upon waking.

Mrs. Cartland understood that he wished still to be alone with her, and she did all in her power to stanch the blood, which flowed for some time ; and then she took her place beside him once more. He was prostrate from exhaustion, but a smile lit up his face, as she laid her hands upon his feeble ones ; and so he sank quite gradually away, power of speech was lost in weakness, till just at the last,

the flame of life gave one bright flicker, and he said :

“ Remember, love, I love you to the last ! ”

Once more he opened his eyes.

“ Those words, Kate ; what—were those words ?
‘ *The blood* ’ ? ”

And Kate fell upon her knees, holding the almost dead hands, and breathed that blessed promise into the failing ears of the dying man who had lived an unbeliever ; and she saw that he believed at last ; for a glorious smile of intelligence passed across his ashen-hued face—lending a beauty even to death itself—and all was still. The spirit had fled, but the smile rested still upon the lifeless clay.

And Dr. Harry Cartland was gone, as he said, to solve the Great Mystery, which, sooner or later every man must do for himself.

CHAPTER XII.

FATE.

WHEN Mrs. Cartland knew that death had indeed overtaken her husband, a stupor fell upon her, and she remained for hours upon her knees by his side.

Dr. Duval had peeped into the room when darkness set in, and found that utter silence reigned.

He roused the prostrate woman, and led her forcibly from the room, and tried to get her to partake of food, but she turned from it with loathing.

He made her swallow a little wine, and she sat with wide-open haunted eyes and listless hands, gazing into space, endeavouring to see through the barrier which divided the finite from the infinite, which kept her from still seeing her love.

After awhile she rose and crept back to her dead ; the moonlight shone upon his beloved form—how precious the cold clay even was to *her* !

So she passed the night kneeling there beside him, till morning dawned.

George Grafton went to dine with his new

friend, Sydney Saunders, and the two men suited each other.

There is no better cement for forming a friendship than that fact. How often people, both estimable in their way, may be found who don't get on and never will, simply because they don't suit.

Troubled as he was, George felt a pleasure in this man's companionship ; and while he was with him he almost succeeded in putting dull care aside ; but when at eleven o'clock he found himself alone again walking back to his hotel, with the September moon shining on his path, a new restlessness seized upon him.

He would go down by the night train to Windsor, and walk over to The Nook, and inquire for his old friend. Of course he would not go in, for had they not taken their farewell of each other ? There was no reason on earth for his going—it was a trick of fancy which led him on—it was inexorable fate !

George walked from the station, feeling no weariness in the fresh morning air ; came upon the river-banks, and stopped to watch the circles made by rising fish, or angler, playing some

monster jack on greedy feed, as jack nature is of early morns.

He took pleasure in the songs of birds above his head, or in bushes by his side ; marked the fresh stacks of harvesting just thatched with golden straw ; wondered at the early smoke that rose through the clear sky from the thrifty cottagers' breakfast-fires, lighted thus soon to send the workmen out armed for their toil, and then he came within sight of the gables of *The Nook*, and started to find himself there, as if he had come almost without his own consent or knowledge ; and what was he to do since he was here ?

It was too early to rouse even the servants in the house—only five o'clock—and still he wandered on, opening and shutting gates mechanically, as if he had a fixed purpose, but he had none.

He entered the shrubbery, and walked into the garden looking at the flowers, and rested on a seat, from whence he noticed that all the blinds were down, except in one room downstairs, which was, he fancied, the room occupied by the dying man. This he thought so strange that he longed to know why it should be so ; blinds up and an open window, enough to kill any sick man outright.

George was not inquisitive by nature, but fate was too strong for him.

The soft lawn went straight up to the window ; no crunch of crisp pebbly gravel announced the footstep of the intruder ; and on he walked to his doom.

Will nothing in heaven or earth stop him ere he looks into that room ? Has God no pity, that He can permit a guiltless man to suffer as if he had been the vilest thing on earth ?

Kate ! here is Nemesis at last, after your three years of bliss ! The relentless finger of Fate itself points the way to the unveiling of the mystery.

How now for Beryl's broken heart ?—innocent, lovely, loving Beryl ! Yes, she too must suffer and her unconscious nameless child. The guilty one has passed to a higher tribunal, and smiles still at the blessed promise of forgiveness by Kate's side.

George Grafton went up to the window opened to the ground ; saw the dead man lying on his bed with placid upturned face ; saw a woman kneeling by his side as if in prayer, her dark head buried amidst the tumbled clothes where she had writhed in agony and misery, praying wordless prayers for

resignation, and for the peace of the soul of her love.

What should George Grafton do there, intruding on the grief of the sorrowing wife of his dead friend? And yet something in the *pose* of the prostrate woman chained him to the spot.

Had his salvation depended on his walking from that sad sight without another look, perdition must have been his doom!

His whole being was concentrated into one sense; he watched as if his very life depended on what his sight could reveal to him! Yes, and how much more than life!

At last, unable to control himself, he stepped into the room, and the movement aroused the mourner.

She gazed at the intruder with wide-open horror-stricken eyes—gazed speechless with agonised terror; while *he* stood equally horribly silently transfixed.

Each to the other in belief—DEAD!

There, between the two men who had loved her, both of whom she had loved—but in so different a way—Kate stood, and if sin can be expiated by suffering here on earth, hers must

have been blotted from the book of life. Great drops of agony rose like pearls upon her ivory brow.

After a silence which seemed a lifetime to each, George pronounced her name.

The well-known voice struck upon her ear, and was answered by a piercing shriek from the wretched woman.

"What!" she cried, "have you come back to life to reproach me? Why do you not rest in your grave? Oh George, I was fond of you, but I loved him—oh, I loved him!"

He advanced a step towards her, but she waved him back wildly.

"Back from the dead!" she shrieked—"back from the dead! you have come to divide us; but no one can do that—keep off! keep off! you shall not touch him!"

Her eyes flashed out lurid light, her white arm extended to keep evil from her dead.

Her shrieks and excited tones aroused the household, who flocked to the room pale and wondering.

Dr. Duval was the first to enter. Even he could not understand the scene, but he saw at

once that Harry Cartland's widow was raving mad.

The day of the funeral arrived at last, and by force they had to remove the mad woman from the room, which she had never quitted since she had seen George Grafton, as she supposed, arisen from his grave, to part her from her lost love. And now, with the cunning of madness, she watched the sad procession depart.

Finding herself locked in, she clambered from the window and followed on foot, never losing sight of the hearse containing her dead.

They lowered the coffin into the grave.

"Dust to dust" had been solemnly pronounced by the officiating clergyman, when a terrible scene ensued.

Kate, unseen before, came suddenly into the midst of the astonished party, and raising her hands and eyes passionately to heaven, she cried, "My love! my love! I will never leave you," and fell with a wailing cry heavily to the ground.

Her grief and beauty touched all who were present, and she was gently raised and placed in one of the carriages, and conveyed back to The

Nook, and soon put under the care of a keeper, for she was pronounced a confirmed maniac, of whose recovery there was but little hope.

CHAPTER XIII.

HARRY CARTLAND'S CONFESSION.

GEORGE GRAFTON was completely stunned by the discovery of the wife he had mourned as dead being alive as the supposed wife of another, the agony of mind that he suffered being increased by the impossibility of extracting a word of explanation from the senseless maniac. The burthen of her cry being that he had come back from the grave to part her from her love. Her love! Ah! the agony to that faithful heart in those self-condemning words! And agony was heaped on agony when he remembered that other wife of his—that patient loving little being, who awaited his coming in a distant land, but to return to whom now would be a sin black as night.

In his despair the kind face of Sydney Saunders came before him, and he turned his back upon that house of death, madness, and sin; out again into

the fields ; not now seeing God's hand in the works of nature around him, but going on—on, blindly on.

At last he was standing at the office-door, a wreck of the man who had left it but the day before ; sunken cheeks and hollow eyes told their tale of suffering.

" Good God ! Grafton, what is the matter with you ?" asked the lawyer quickly, as he looked inquiringly at the other.

And George Grafton told the story right through to his new friend, from the time he had parted from his wife at Hazelhurst, up to the present, when he had left her a maniac at The Nook, clinging to her beloved dead. As the story proceeded, Sydney Saunders could scarcely restrain his excitement. He listened, holding his breath lest he should lose a word. And now the tale was begun and finished, and he found that the woman for whom he had taken a romantic fancy, had a husband living still, though one was deceased, and she was mad.

And then there returned to his mind the words that Dr. Cartland had used when he asked him to be his wife's friend.

"What do you make of it all?" asked George.

"Why this, Grafton, that Dr. Cartland has played a villain's part, and that however wrong your wife may have been in her love for the man, she is innocent of any connivance with, or knowledge of, this shameful plot."

George grasped the lawyer's hand.

"Thank you for those words, Saunders; weak my wife must have been, but I can never believe in her guilt; poor Kate! poor Kate!" And then, after a pause: "And now I want your advice. As a man of honour, what can I do? You know I have married again, and I have a son by my second wife. Oh God!" he groaned, "never my wife, but as pure as an angel of light! In pity tell me—tell me what I can do, how I can act in such a maze of iniquity. Whatever course I take, it seems to me, must be fraught with ruin to her—my loving Beryl. To return to her as her husband, would be blackest treachery and sin; to leave her alone, to bear the shame I have brought on her and the child, would be cruelty."

"Perhaps some honest fellow will make her his wife, and comfort her with his love, Grafton: this Mr. Summers of whom you spoke just now."

"Ah! if I could but think so! But no, I know her faithful heart too well. She will ever consider herself bound to me while I live; my death only can release her, poor darling."

"Don't get such a morbid fancy into your head, Grafton!" answered Saunders earnestly.

"You need not fear for me," said George, "I am perfectly sane, and I fear God. I am not likely to make away with myself, but I should hail death as the best companion I could meet with. I have lived my life; it can hold nothing for me now but misery; but there may be work for me to do yet. I must wait for this letter which is to tell me all."

Sydney Saunders kept an eye on his friend. He did not like his melancholy quietness.

The days crept slowly by, lead-weighted to George; but however laggard time may seem, it goes surely, marking its flight by days and nights, as it goes to join in the vast circle of eternity.

At last, as it appeared to George, the mortal remains of Dr. Cartland were laid to rest. There had been, after all, but five little days since the love-light had gone out of the eyes that looked on Kate—five days since life had ended for George

too. When he found her—his lost wife—found her! but how? Five days of numbness, of dead despair. Had he wished for a divorce from Kate, her insanity would have precluded it. He could never repair the bitter wrong he had done Beryl—his wife—the mother of his only child.

Wherever he looked there was nothing but the blackness of desolation. Nothing could help Kate, her state shut her out from relief of any kind. She was past pity, past love, past blame, past reproach. As dead to him, in her incurable madness, as if she were ten feet underground, with a tombstone as tall as the Monument or the Tower of Babel.

Beryl then must be his thought, and yet he must never see her again, never look into the pure clear depths of her love-laughing eyes, never kiss the carnation lips which for him alone had pouted, tempting kisses unawares, never stroke the bright fair head with its glory of rippling hair, never clasp the fragile form in his arms, never press her to his heart, and hear hers beat for him. She was lost, lost, lost! How cold had been his return for her love, and such love. How unwillingly he had taken her into his life, and having taken her, how she had crept into his heart, warming it with her warmth

and life. Still he had kept a chamber in it where Kate yet reigned, and in which there had been no room for the child-wife. But now that she was lost to him, he knew what she had been, what she was to him still—the dearest thing on earth, a ray of light from Heaven, and that life without her would be a dreary business, and yet he *must* so live. Not for the happiness of time and eternity would he add to the wrong he had already done her unknowingly. Poor innocent darling! She would suffer, but it was better for her to suffer than sin! Beryl and purity were synonymous terms in his mind.

Sydney Saunders entered his room according to appointment, and gave George the expected letter, which he opened with trembling hands. It contained a short note and a packet.

The note ran as follows :

“MY DEAR GRAFTON,—Before you receive this letter I shall have departed out of this world ; my time in it is even now short, and while I have still strength I am anxious to confess to you, whom I have injured, how low I have fallen ; and

yet I would do it all again, and worse, for the happiness the deception has given me.

"Three years of bliss! If there *be* a God I thank Him for it; if there be a hell I am content to suffer for it. I should die happier if I could have your forgiveness. Much as I have injured you, Grafton, I have liked you better than other men.

"If you can forgive me, do, and do not curse me. My darling is well provided for; she is innocent of all but loving me. If that be guilt she was guilty; for she loved me with a love equal to my own for her; but she married me believing you to have been drowned on your passage to Ceylon.

"She was ignorant of all that went before, as the enclosed packet will show.

"You are happy with another wife, Grafton. Be happy still, and leave poor Kate in her present belief that you are dead.

"Good-bye, for the last time, George. I wish I had injured any other man than you—but I would not recall it if I could.

"Yours no more,

"H. CARTLAND."

The letter fell from George's hand.

"Married him, believing me to be dead!" he gasped. "Poor Kate! poor innocent Kate! to have fallen into the hands of such a villain. Saunders!" he cried, laying his hand upon his arm heavily—"Saunders, do you hear? she believed me dead—believed me dead! Oh my God! that for three years he can have kept up this farce, bringing misery upon the innocent! When I think of Kate, and of Beryl, I feel as if no curses could be too heavy to heap upon the man who has done this thing."

"Grafton," said Mr. Saunders, "the man is dead; he has gone to give an account to a higher power than man's. If you curse him now it can only rebound on your own head; he is past the reach of it. The only thing you could do would be to blacken his memory, and that would be to tell the world of the terrible position in which you are placed; to bring disgrace on the innocent woman who believes herself your wife. Leave the sinner in God's hands, and do your best to shield your poor girl from the knowledge of her position. Plead business, plead illness, make any excuse, but never let her know the real reason of your not

returning to her, poor soul. Grafton," said he, after a pause, "so intensely do I feel for your Beryl that, if it could be, I would make her my wife, and stand by her in her trouble. I have never seen her, but what of that? It would be a thing to be proud of to stand up with such a woman against the world."

George grasped the hand of the lawyer, and answered in a choked voice :

"God reward you, Saunders ; and if ever my poor Beryl wants a friend I know she will find one in you. But not while I live will she believe herself free. Beryl, Beryl, my poor child, what can I do with you ?"

"You have not read Cartland's confession yet, Grafton," said Sydney Saunders, anxious to call off his attention from the poor girl his love had injured.

"Read it to me," said George ; "my eyes are dim."

They were dim—dim with tears for his lost trusting Beryl—the treasure he might never call his own again as long as he lived.

And the lawyer unfolded and read :

HARRY CARTLAND'S CONFESSION TO
GEORGE GRAFTON.

From the moment I saw your wife as Kate Kerley on your wedding-day, I loved her, but I studiously kept the secret of that love from her. She did not love me, and the knowledge of it would insure my dismissal from your house with ignominy. It was, however, happiness enough to see her and to be near her, which our old friendship enabled me to be. She grew to like me—she grew to love me—how gradual it was; but I found it out one glorious evening as she sang.

Oh how she shrank from me after that! but I was patient, never scaring her with a look or a word. I was with her daily, and I was content.

Then you went away and left me still free to come and go in your home. How could I who loved her resist any longer. I stayed away and made her feel lonely. Then she protected herself by sending for your sister, and I turned that against her. I used Miss Grafton to make her jealous, to make her acknowledge to herself and me the depth of her love; not for you, her legal

husband, but for me—for me. The night before your sister left they both expected I was going to propose to Laura, but I was only maddening Kate. I knew I must madden her before I could make her acknowledge her love for me. It was unmanly, but I did it. She left me with Miss Grafton, and I found the *truth*, or part of it, was necessary.

I told your sister that I did not mean to marry, and she left me and went to her room. I lingered on, hoping to see Kate, but she never came near me.

At last I strolled into the garden—into the wilderness. There I found her, a white heap prone on the dark damp ground, struggling, struggling with her love for me. I found her thus, and I loved her madly. Was it likely that I should forego my advantage? Not I. I poured my passionate pleading in words of fire into her ears—into her heart, and I made her confess her love by the violence of mine.

Ah my darling, how she clung to me. She was mad with the joy of our love. She would have left all for love and me that night, my sweet darling; but your sister was there, and I said we must wait till to-morrow, then I would come for

her. What Kate suffered from the time I left her till I saw her again I can imagine, but I cannot explain.

I went to the station thinking it *possible* she might be there with your sister, but if not I felt I should be glad to show Miss Grafton the civility of seeing her off, after which I should know that Kate was alone—alone for me. She had not expected me, as I saw by the pallor that overspread her face.

The train was gone, and I handed her into my carriage with the determination never to part with her again while she and I both lived. She was ill and trembling; she tried to speak; but with what difficulty the words came!

I drove her to my own house; she was very unwilling to enter it, but I told her I must talk to her, and she said she too had something she must say to me; so she came in, and I had conquered.

I let her and myself in with a private key, no one saw us enter; the carriage had driven round to the stable, and I took her to my private rooms, where I never allowed any foot but my own to enter. I threw my arms about her; how she trembled!

"Kate!" I cried, "mine—mine at last; mine so long as we live—my darling, darling, how I love you!"

I kissed her with untiring lips of passionate entreaty, but she only trembled like a shaken leaf. I held her in my arms, pleading for her consent to stay with me, then and ever. I can see now the deadly struggle that love and duty held within her breast, and then she slipped from my embrace, down, down, down, cowering at my feet, holding them in her agony—her lovely face caressing them.

"I love you!" she cried. "Oh my God! I say it and live!"

How she writhed in the soul-suffering she went through!

I lifted up my darling and placed her in a chair, and knelt to her; she should not humble herself to me.

"Kate," I said—"Kate, what does this mean? If you love me thus, why this bitter grief? Surely we shall be happy—oh how happy, love!" I cried triumphantly, holding her dear hands in mine, and looking into the depths of her troubled glorious eyes.

"Harry," she said calmly, "I ask your forgiveness for having deceived you. I love you beyond anything and everything on earth, but I am George's wife, and I must be true to my vows to him. My God! I must, I MUST!" she cried passionately.

"Yet, Kate, you would have come with me last night. What is the difference between last night and to-day? Were you not equally his wife then?" I asked reproachfully.

"Yes, yes, I know; I am deceitful to you both, but I was mad then, and now I am sane. Harry!" she cried with excitement, "I suffered the tortures of the damned last night after you left. You gave me all those hours for reflection, and during them I saw the enormity of the sin I had been so ready to commit. Not only was I on the verge of selling my soul and yours, but of breaking the heart of the truest man ever born of woman. Harry—Harry—I cannot take back my love; that you have, and it is not in my power to take it again, but it is in my power to keep from going utterly to the devil, and taking you with me, and I am determined not to do it. I would rather die."

"And this is your love!" I cried, gazing into

the earnest eyes. "This is the love which I believed would surpass the love of all women in the world. Oh Kate, Kate!" and I who had never shed a tear in my life, fell into a passion of weeping, shaken by the sobs of despair and cruellest disappointment.

Kate's arms were about me, her lips upon my fevered brow.

"I love you! hush, hush, Harry, hush!"

She soothed me as if I had been a child. Her touch added fuel to fire.

"Kate," I cried, "you shall never leave me—never. I swear it. Love is the only thing that can bind a man to a woman—a woman to a man. We are bound hand and foot, body and soul; we will never part again."

"I must go now," she answered, as if in fear. "Good-bye."

She rose and held out her cold hand.

"We will never say that, sweetheart, till either you or I die!" I answered firmly.

"Let me go!" she pleaded.

"Go where, Kate?"

"Home," she answered, trembling.

"My darling, you are at home, and by the God

you believe in, you shall never leave me for any other;" and I left the room, carefully locking it after me, to go and see for some dinner for my darling. I must get it from a pastrycook's and bring it in myself, so as to arouse no suspicion in the minds of the servants. There was no bell in the room. Kate could not call for assistance, and the suite of rooms were lighted from the roof. She was safe, and undoubtedly mine. Just as I was leaving the house Fate put into my hand a tool which made it easy for me to keep Kate without suspicion. There was an earnest request that I should hurry out to see a young woman who had been taken very ill, and was now in a cab outside. I went to see her at once, and found that she was in a dying state from congestion of the lungs.

It was evident that the girl had a history, but she would not tell me a word of it, and answered my questions with pain and difficulty. She said she had no home and nowhere to go, and asked if I would give her an order of admission to one of the hospitals. She had dark hair, dark eyes, and small features, not unlike Kate's, and was about her height, but she was older and thinner ; still the

likeness tempted me. I told her I would take her to a respectable lodging I knew of, and getting into the cab with her I bade the man drive to Kentish Town, trusting to luck for what I wanted.

Yes, that would do, and I stopped the cab and went in, and had a talk to the landlady. She was very needy, and not very inquisitive. She undertook to nurse the young lady, and helped her in. I knew she could not recover. I knew, also, that whoever she was, she meant to keep her secret, for she would give me no clue to it. This was Saturday. I paid the landlady well, and she did all she could for the dying woman, but nothing could save her.

I went back to Kate, took her dinner to her myself, and did my best to make her comfortable. She sat by the fireplace, silently looking at the empty hearth, her hands lying feebly in her lap. She only spoke to me once—she asked me to let her go home. I told her I had telegraphed to her servants that she was too unwell to return, and that she would remain with friends for a day or two. She looked up at me.

“I am unwell, Dr. Cartland. This will kill me; let me go home.”

It was all in vain.

"I am going to kill you, Kate," I laughed, "in a way you little dream of."

Even she smiled, never for a second imagining what I meant—how should she?—smiled at the idea of my killing her. I did my best to make her happy and comfortable.

"Kate," I said, straining her unwilling form to my breast, "I will never ask you to be a wife to me till you can tell me you stay of your own free will."

"And that will never be while *George lives!* Harry, be content with my love; ask no more of me, I can be no more to you. It is not too late even now; let me go, love, don't keep me like a caged bird, or I may learn to hate you. Come and see me as you used to do. I can't live quite without you, dear, but don't disgrace me before all the world. Don't, Harry—don't. I could not bear it," lifting tearful eyes to mine. "You may keep me here a year—two—ten—but I never can be more to you than I am now," she cried, with flushed cheeks.

"Very well, Kate, so be it; but if you knew that George was dead, how soon then would you

become my wife?" grasping her arm tightly, and awaiting her reply.

"You wouldn't kill him!" she gasped, with dilated nostrils and wide-open eyes, like a frightened horse.

"Kill him! bah, child—no! Come, tell me soon?"

"When I cease to be his I am yours, love," she answered earnestly. "While he lives—NEVER!"

I kissed and left her, then sent a comissionaire down to Hazelhurst for some clothes for her, and took them to her when they arrived. The next day the stranger-woman died. In her extremity I sent for another doctor whom I knew slightly—Dr. Duval, a man who had lived abroad all his days, and we were both with her when life ceased. Then I had the body dressed in one of Kate's night-dresses, which I had abstracted from the bag her maid had sent from Hazelhurst.

On Monday I ordered the coffin. On Tuesday I took her down there as your wife, and buried her by her name. I had noticed the scratch on Kate's arm—I made one on that of the dead woman, in case of any investigation.

Miss Ansell suspected me, but she could prove

nothing, and the body was sworn to by Kate's own maid.

Great was my relief when the funeral was over. A week I had kept my darling under lock and key, still she was obdurate, shrinking from me. My love had made no way with her—she was faithful to you, George.

On the Saturday morning I opened my newspaper and read :

“Loss of the May Queen, and all hands on board !”

How eagerly I scanned this short notice. The May Queen was supposed to have struck on the Maldivé Rocks. A vessel had picked up some timber bearing her name, and that was all that was left to tell the tale of this dreadful loss of life and property.

The quick blood rushed through my veins, and crushing the paper into my pocket I walked up to Kate's rooms. She was sitting listlessly as usual, and hardly looked up as I entered.

“Kate,” I said, my heart knocking hard against my ribs—“Kate,” I said, with subdued passion, “you told me the other day that if you were free you would be mine at once, did you not ?”

"I did, Harry, and I repeat it ; but I am not free, and you are bringing ruin and disgrace on me by detaining me here."

Her lips trembled painfully, and she clasped and unclasped her hands—too nervous to keep still.

"My darling!" I cried, "you are free ; come, come to me !"

She sprang from her chair, a look of horror was on her face. She caught blindly at something to support her, and asked with trembling :

"George—is——?"

I finished the sentence for her—"DEAD! Yes, Kate, drowned ; the May Queen has gone down with all hands on board."

She sank back into her chair—dazed. She passed her restless hand across her brow again and again. After a while she asked to see the paper herself, and then without another word she came and put her arms about my neck.

"My love can hurt no one now, dear. I am yours now poor George has gone. Tell me you love me, Harry, or my heart will break."

My answer was to pour out upon her the pent-up passion of my soul. Now then, at last, she was

truly mine. She had given herself up to me quivering in response to my wild embraces. Oh how I loved her! Before noon next day she was my wife. We were married by special licence, with no one to witness to the validity of the marriage but the clergyman, the clerk, and the old woman who cleaned the church. They managed everything between them, and I took my dear wife straight away to Dover, and thence to the Continent, to travel, for she had altered sadly during that one week I held her in captivity. And then for me there came an awakening. We were married, and Kate was unknowingly a bigamist. You still lived. You had been saved, I found, with others from the wreck. To tell Kate this would have been to lose her, and, worse than that, to cause her the most fearful remorse and misery. All believed her dead. It was impossible for her to return to her old home, or to your relations. I watched over her, allowing neither people nor papers to come near her, till I feared the complete loss of my practice unless I looked after it a little. I had left Duval to attend to it. When we had been married three months I took Kate home. We lived at an hotel till I found The Nook,

where I settled with my darling happily. She grieved for you as for a lost brother, but gave me all the love and worship of her woman's heart. Poor Kate, my wish was law to her. I begged her never to go out anywhere without me, and she obeyed me to the letter. Ours was perfect love and complete happiness. She never knew of your rescue, never knew of your marriage to the girl with the romantic name which I forget. If she ever hears of one or the other, George, it will break her heart. Remember she was true to you in temptation, and spare her. No one but you and Saunders need ever know of this, and he has promised to befriend my darling. I alone am to blame. Kate is innocent. He will take care this reaches you, and if you wisely decide to remain in Ceylon no unpleasant revelations can ever be made to your wife. Women are apt to try and discover your secrets if they think there is any mystery.

H. CARTLAND.

June, 187-.

The lawyer and the client sat silent after the above revelation. What was there to say? The sinner was dead. The sinned against suffering.

The former was beyond the reach of punishment, the latter was past the hope of help. Then there came to George the remembrance of that text which before he had never seen much sense in: "Thy strength shall be to sit still."

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS ANSELL DOES HER DUTY.

GEORGE GRAFTON had an interview with Miss Ansell. She was Kate's only relation, and he thought, hard as she was, she would be moved to pity, and he was right.

He felt that the sight of him could only make Kate more violent, believing him to be an avenging spirit. He longed much to take her in his arms, and to give her one kiss of forgiveness, but feared the sight of him would harm her. He told Miss Ansell his sad story word for word, and asked her advice.

Never before had the austere old woman been overtaken by weakness. But now tears chased each other down her wrinkled cheeks and she kissed George! and told him that never from *her*

lips should anyone hear of the mystery that had overshadowed his life !

She offered to receive Kate and a woman-keeper, and promised to see that she was treated with care and kindness; and then she asked in a troubled voice about Beryl, and George told her that he was going to keep her in the dark as long as possible, but that he would not return to her.

He confessed that he had not made up his mind what he should do yet, but that he had decided he and Beryl must never meet again ; and Miss Ansell, grasping his hand, blinked away her tears to look at him, for, as she remarked, he was the first good man she had met with in the course of her long life.

So they agreed that the secret should rest with those three (themselves and Mr. Saunders) ; not even Dr. Grafton was to know of the sad trouble that had fallen on George—his son.

Kate was once more received under her aunt's roof.

The old woman had prepared for her a suite of newly chintzed rooms, and the poor maniac had settled down to her objectless life.

She was seldom violent, but utterly listless.

Her love of flowers seemed all that was left to her of the past. Memory appeared to have failed. At times, if anything reminded her of her lost love, she broke out. The tolling of a bell drove her frantic, but she had not the reason to tell you why.

She became a shadow of the Kate of olden times—beautiful still, but sad to look upon. There was now no sense in the large dark eyes that looked so unnaturally big in her pale sunken face.

Anything pretty attracted her, as if she were still a child.

Miss Ansell had a liberal allowance with her, and did all in her power to make her happy; bought her flowers and fruits, and all the things she showed any pleasure in. She drove or walked daily with her attendant, and on one of these excursions took a fancy to a small dog at a cottage-door. The dog was something for her to love, and the poor unreasoning creature clung to it wildly, crying if it were taken out of her sight.

Everything went on quietly in the old maid's establishment. Kate had her dog, and was happy, the past being mercifully hidden from her.

Kate's money made Miss Ansell's circumstances easy; not that she would have hesitated to receive

her great-niece if she had been penniless, for she considered it her duty. And George had gone home to stay with his parents. The strain upon his nerves at last had worn him nearly out. His father feared brain fever, and called in fresh advice; it proved to be but too true, and George Grafton lay between life and death.

Mrs. Grafton, not knowing her son's sad secret, did the one thing which in all the world he would have wished her to leave undone—she wrote and told Beryl.

CHAPTER XV.

HOPES AND FEARS.

GEORGE had tender nurses in his mother and sisters, but the grim scythe-bearer was strong, and he, worn out with trouble and sickness, was very weak, but fought every inch of ground manfully, amidst the hopes and fears of his relations.

If he had had happiness and love to live for, he could not have made a harder struggle of it, and at last he got the upper hand, and was pronounced out of danger.

Then, week, by week, day by day, he dragged on wearily the long hours of weakness, strengthening as slowly as the lengthening light of spring's earliest days.

All the time Beryl and her child are coming—coming, as fast as they can.

When little Beryl got her mother-in-law's letter, she was beside herself with grief; but directly she saw that it was her duty to go to him, she roused herself to action, packed up and started, as if she were accustomed to life's buffets.

Ah, the hopes and fears of that loving heart! Each oscillation of the screw throbbed to some troubled thought of George. Even the horror of being again on shipboard was lost in the agony of her mind to see him once more, to know that he still lived and loved her.

It was so far off, such a long way to go to him—might he not be worse before she reached England? shivering and awe-stricken, she asked herself. Might he not be dead! dead! dead!

She strained her eyes for the white cliffs of Albion—her sinking heart sick with suspense. How should she find him? alive or dead?

At anchor at last! Such a scene of confusion

that small Beryl is bewildered utterly. The steam is being let off with deafening noise and blinding mist. A thick November fog lies dark and heavy upon land and sea. Eager faces looking out for friends on shore, hidden by the thickness of the atmosphere. Sailors and passengers hurrying to and fro, luggage bumping and banging on the deck, cries of porters and hotel-touters on the quay, greeting of acquaintances ; faces bright with happiness, faces blank with disappointment ; faces flushed with expectancy, faces pinched by sorrow ; faces blue with cold, all—all—going on shore ; and among them Beryl and her boy, and no one has come to meet her.

She feels this with a sense of blankness—of disappointment, and puts it away with impatience.

How should they know she was coming ? Of course they couldn't—it was absurd of her to have expected it ; and she hurried to the station, and on again to find George ; and there she is at last at Dr. Grafton's door, with panting heart and small worn-out body, inquiring for Mr. George Grafton !

"Mr. George was better," the servant said, looking curiously at the agitated face before him—"better, and out of danger, but very weak !"

And poor Beryl, the strain taken off which had held her nerves at tightest tension for so long, collapsed, and would have fallen to the ground but for the strong arms of the servant, which found no difficulty in supporting the little body and carrying her into his master's surgery.

Beryl was not expected. How were the Graftons to know that she would undertake such a weary journey all alone? They did not know the girl and her loving heart, or they might have done so; and to their surprise George had never mentioned her to them, and if they brought her name on the tapis, he shrank with such visible pain from the subject that they were not inclined to care for the small creature, and were surprised (not pleasantly) to learn that a little woman with a fine baby—a servant—and numerous large boxes had arrived; and that the former was lying insensible in the surgery.

Dr. Grafton, however, went to her at once, and looking on her still sweet face, confessed to himself it was angelic, and fell in love with her on the spot.

It was not long before the blue eyes unclosed to look at him, and he leaned over the girl and

told her who he was, and she gave him two little hands and called him "Father."

She entreated to be allowed to go at once to her husband—it would be such a pleasant surprise for him.

Dr. Grafton said that George was asleep.

"Oh!" cried Beryl, "I will not disturb him; I will creep in so quietly, and sit beside him; and when he wakes he will find me there."

Dr. Grafton smiled. He would rather his son had been told of the advent of his wife; but he had not the heart to cause a cloud on the eager little face, turned up to him so confidingly, and he did not believe a joyful shock would hurt anyone. So Beryl had her way; and after being introduced to her new relations, and leaving them "baby" to amuse, she crept with gentle feet to her husband's door, into the room, gazed upon the sleeping face with an intense longing to run and kiss her darling, resisted the innocent temptation, and seated herself beside the bed, almost hidden by the curtains which hung from the Arabian top; and from there she watched the dear face. How altered it was! —altered and pain-stricken.

What he must have suffered, to have brought

such lines and care-marks on the brow that was so placid! and in her grief for his sufferings, a slight cry escaped her lips. His name, uttered with such gentleness and sorrow, such tender passion and compassion. It was so soft, it might have been breathed by some being from another world; but, slight as the sound was, it had aroused him; or perhaps it was the unknown influence merely of Beryl's presence. But George stirred, moved uneasily, and repeated, in a tone of such unutterable anguish:

"Lost—lost, lost! Beryl, my little Beryl, lost, lost—lost!"

"Oh George," cried the small wife, "wake, love, wake!"

Better to wake than to dream such dreams she thought as she rose and bent over him, looking at the horror of his awakened face.

"George," she pleaded, "I am not lost. I am here, my love. I am here with you, and I will never leave you again."

For one moment his face lighted up as with sunshine, and he held out his eager arms to clasp her; but before she had time to shelter there he dropped them with an exceeding bitter cry:

"Never again while I live!" and lay in a stupor as of death.

"Father in Heaven," prayed Beryl, sinking on her knees, "give him back to me, and show me how to comfort him."

And then she rang the bell, and loving faces gathered round the bed. Beryl stood there white and motionless.

Dr. Grafton whispered :

"It was mad of me to let you go to him ; the shock has been too much."

But George Grafton pulled through, and again awoke to find his wife by his side with painful pleasure ; lying quietly with a half-smile, while she caressed him, wondering—oh, how she wondered that he gave her no welcome, that she was not asked into his arms to nestle there !

And then she brought the boy, and at sight of him George's breast swelled convulsively, and Beryl's gentle heart was torn by his sobs of agony, and she gently but firmly took him in her arms.

"George," she said, "you are in some trouble ; this is not the effect of illness. I am your wife, and I have the right to share it, and share it I will."

"Beryl," he moaned, "*I am* in trouble, bitterest, sorest trouble; but I cannot tell it to you. It would break your heart, as it has done mine." And then, after a pause, he broke out passionately: "For the love of God, leave me, Beryl; leave me, and let me never look upon your face again! Oh my darling, my darling! I am weak. It drives me mad to see you by me, and know that to clasp you to my heart would be a sin. Help me, Beryl, help me; be brave, and go away while there is yet time, before I yield to this cruel temptation to hold by you, in defiance of the laws of God and man. Go, child, go; you cannot, must not, stay here!"

She looked at him with despair gnawing at her heart. Was he mad? her love, her darling, her own dear husband, that he should wish to send her from him? His little Beryl, his loving wife! White as death she stood looking at him; her blue eyes all pupil, and darkness in the horror of her gaze, her small hands clasped and locked, as if she were struggling for life.

George saw her soul's suffering, and crying:

"Once more, love!" he drew her to him eagerly, and held her to his heart in a passionate embrace. "May God bless you, dear one, and protect you

from harm. Now go and ask my father to come to me. I want to talk to him alone."

"Alone? Without me?" she asked, lifting her wondering eyes to his.

"Yes; without you, little one. Beryl, I must learn to do without you."

"It won't be for long, George. How long will this talk last? ten minutes? If you are more, I shall come back!"

And she left him with a smile—a smile called to her lips by the renewed pressure of the arms that had clasped her so tenderly, though with such wild words—and she sought her father-in-law, half in joy, half sorrow; and when she had found him she seated herself at his feet and took possession of his hands, and looked up with affectionate confidence in his face.

"Father—George's father—you wouldn't deceive me, would you?"

"Deceive you, child; indeed I would not. Who could look into your trusting face and do so? No one, surely."

"I am so glad you like me," she said, with a half-shy smile of pleasure. "Will you please tell me what brought on George's illness?"

"I cannot do that, child, for it has been a puzzle to me."

"Father," said Beryl, putting one hand impressively on his arm, "you—you don't think," hesitating between each word, "that—that he is mad!"

"Good heavens, child, mad! such a thing as madness has never been heard of in our family. Mad, indeed. He has of course been delirious. Brain fever is no joke, I can assure you; but all his painful fancies have left him with returning health. He will be able to take you about soon again, my dear, and you will find him sane enough, I'll warrant."

"And yet," said Beryl simply, while tears stood in her eyes, "he has been asking me to go away and leave him, and never to let me see him any more. I love him so that it is hard to bear"—her tears falling silently and fast—"and yet he clasped me to him as if it were pain to part with me. Oh, he *does* love me—he does, he does!"

Dr. Grafton regarded her pityingly.

"You have vexed him, child; run, tell him you are sorry, and he will soon dry those tears, or I am not acquainted with my son," he said, with an honest

laugh. "Lovers' quarrels are soon mended, little Beryl."

"Dr. Grafton," she said earnestly, "George and I have never never had a quarrel in our lives, never one word of disagreement."

Her father-in-law looked at her and kissed her forehead.

"Beryl," he said, "I feel sure at any rate you are in no way to blame."

"Thank you," she answered; "and now I must deliver you George's message. He wishes to see you at once, and I am not to be present; but I shall not be very patient, and if you don't call me soon I shall come without."

And Beryl slid away quietly, leaving Dr. Grafton free to answer his son's summons.

"I can't understand it," he muttered—"I can't understand it. An angel for a wife, a cherub for a son, a good income, and yet the lad is miserable—broken-hearted. What can it all mean? Poor George!"

In another minute he was in his son's room, looking into his pale agitated face. "You sent for me, George?"

"Yes, father."

Dr. Grafton sat down beside him.

"George, you are weak and ill, and I fear give way to nervous fancies. You have scared poor little Beryl out of her wits. What have you said to her?"

"Father," said George, "I have tried to bear the burden alone, but it has got beyond me; I must now have your help and advice. If Beryl had not come home it might have been kept secret. Oh, why did she come—why did she come?"

"Because," said Dr. Grafton, regarding him gravely—"because she valued you, George, more than you seem to value her; because she knew you were ill, and because she is your wife."

"Oh God!" cried George, "that is the bitterness of it; she is not my wife—my God, she is not!" looking with despair into the blank dismay of his father's face.

"Not your wife?" said Dr. Grafton; "do I hear you aright, George?"

"You do indeed."

"Then, George," cried the old man, rising in agitation, "you—you are—a scoundrel. Such a child—so sweetly innocent. My God! I can't believe that a son of mine could be so dastardly a

coward. It is impossible, George. You must be mad!"

"Likely enough," answered he sadly. "I have had enough to make me so; but I sent for you, sir, to ask your help, not to hear your reproaches. May God judge me if I have wilfully wronged Beryl. She is all you say, and more; my greatest sin against her was not giving her such a wealth of love as she has bestowed upon me; but I had loved before, and she had not. Still I made her my wife honestly, intending to make her happy, and I think I succeeded."

"For Heaven's sake, George, recollect yourself. A moment ago you said she was not your wife, and now you say you made her your wife. What do you mean?"

"Both things are true," said George. "I did make her so, believing myself free to do it, but I was not. *Kate is alive*, and Beryl is not my wife."

Dr. Grafton staggered like one drunk. The father and son talked long and earnestly over the sad case, tried to hit upon any plan by which Beryl might be spared the knowledge of the cruel position in which she was placed; but no such plan was feasible. Such a woman as George's wife could not

be put off with an excuse. She would never consent to leave him while she believed herself to be his wife. She must be told *the truth*, whatever the consequences might be—the *truth*, the *whole truth*, and *nothing but the truth*!

George told his father the whole story, which Dr. Cartland's confession had put him in possession of, and now it had all to be told again, for Beryl was at the door, asking to come in.

"It is better so," said Dr. Grafton, "better got over at once."

And Beryl came in, and standing between the two looked first at one pale face and then at the other, speechless, not knowing what she had to fear.

CHAPTER XVI.

BERYL'S CHOICE.

"BERYL," said Dr. Grafton, tenderly leading her to a chair, "we are in great trouble; will you try not to add to it, child—by being brave?"

"Yes" (with trembling wonder). "If it is anything very very bad, let me hold George's hand."

And he stretched it out to her at once.

"George, will you tell her, or shall I?" said the old man, shrinking from the painful task.

"I cannot," answered George pitifully.

"Oh, go on!" said Beryl; "what—what is it?"

"Little Beryl," said Dr. Grafton, "you love George, and would do anything to save him pain; from more pain than is necessary."

"I love him," answered Beryl, with bright eager eyes, "and would do anything to save him pain!"

"Then listen, dear child. If after a year and more of married life, George had found that—that—there had been a flaw in the legality of your marriage, you would be sensible, and not distress him by asking him to continue those ties unlawfully, however much he might love you, would you not, little Beryl?"

She grew whiter than a snowdrop, standing with bent neck meekly by.

"I would ask him," she answered, while her cheeks flushed with excitement—"I would ask him to send for a clergyman, and marry me at once—again; that there might be no flaw. I would ask him because, flaw or no flaw, I am his wife before God!"

Then silence, broken by George.

"But darling! if it was worse than a flaw, an obstacle—an obstacle which no human power could remove, what would you do then?"

"I would pray to God, and He would remove it," she answered, with earnest solemnity.

"Beryl, Beryl, it is now as it was when I talked to you that day before we were married. Do you remember?" cried George in an agony.

"Yes, I remember; you said you were going to leave me, and I said I would follow you wherever you went."

"Yes, love! and I gave way to you, little dreaming of the misery which I should cause you; and now the time has come, my darling, when we must part."

"Part!" cried Beryl, with defiant misery; "you cannot send me from you now, for *now* I am your wife."

"Would to God that you were, Beryl!—my little love, try, try, for my sake, to bear it. You are not my wife; my poor darling—*Kate is alive!*"

Beryl uttered no cry, shed no tear; she threw out her arms, as if to ward off the blow with her tiny hands, but all so silently, so sadly. She

looked all the time at George like a somnambulist, making no sign of her suffering.

"Do you understand me, little love?"

"I believe so," she answered; "I am not really your wife! She did not die after all."

"Yes, that is it, love! and my Beryl sees that she must try and make herself happy away from me." George's voice trembled ominously.

"George," she said, gathering herself together "are you going back to—to her?"

"No, no, my precious darling."

"George," she went on, "do you still love me?"

"My darling," he cried passionately, "God knows I love you, I never knew how dearly till I had lost you! You are dearer to me than all the world beside, little one!"

"And you are dearer to me than all the world, George," with a fine smile, drawing up her slender neck. "I choose *you* in preference to the world!"

"Beryl," said Dr. Grafton, "you are too innocent to understand, but believe me, you cannot continue in your present position, as George's supposed wife."

The girl looked at him unflinchingly.

"Why?"

"Good heavens, child! how, how can I answer you?" he cried impatiently; "you don't know what the world would say of you."

"Let the world say what it likes; I will never leave George while he and I live. I will be to him whatever he likes—his wife still if he will; his companion, his friend, his servant; but when you ask me to leave him, I say never, never."

"George," said Dr. Grafton, "perhaps your mother can explain to her better than we can how impossible such an arrangement would be;" and he left the room to seek his wife.

Beryl threw herself on George's breast.

"George," she moaned, "if you send me from you, I shall die!"

"But, my little Beryl, you would not wish to stay with me if it were wrong—a sin?"

"It has not been a sin up to now, love. How can it be more a sin than it has been?"

"Beryl," said George, with a shade of impatience, "you are a perfect child still!"

"And you won't send me away, dearest, will you?" asked the girl, stroking his haggard face.

"Beryl! Beryl! for God's sake don't tempt

me," cried the man, trembling with the excitement he endeavoured to calm, and Beryl trembled too—trembled with pleasure that he still loved her so—trembled with fear lest he should send her from him—trembled that for love she could give up right, but never swerved from her decision.

"George," she said solemnly, "it cannot be wrong to love as I love you. God would not plant such undying affection in my heart just for it to wither and die; if we married not knowing there was a barrier between us, the fault was not ours, it does not release us from our vows. George, we cannot part! What would become of me, what would become of baby if you forsake us?" she pleaded earnestly.

George did not answer for some time. A passionate war was raging in his heart—this little wife of his—how could he give her up? how could he break her gentle spirit and kill her confiding love? She would learn to hate him if he sent her from him, and how could she buffet with the world alone, with no strong arm to protect her? Oh God! and what would his life be without her, with no one to love him, no one to love. The temptation was very strong.

"Beryl," he cried passionately—"Beryl, can you sin for me—can you meet with scorn for me—be looked upon as a vile thing among men and women for my sake—be an outcast from society and lose your self-respect, all—all, for me?"

She looked at him with a pale, firm face; the blood had forsaken her lips, but she trembled no longer.

"Yes, George, I can and will."

"Then may God help you, child, and forgive me," he cried, gathering her to him with hungry eagerness.

This was Beryl's choice.

CHAPTER XVII.

GONE!

MRS. GRAFTON spoke seriously to Beryl, and did all she could to break the resolution she had formed to stand by her son, but all her talk availed nothing. The girl was gentle, but as firm as a rock. Dr. Grafton said a great deal to George, but his own conscience said more; he had ever been in every sense of the word, an honourable

man, and now he told himself he was on the verge of becoming a scoundrel !

If a pure innocent creature like Beryl was willing to sully her purity and innocence for him because of her deep love for him, surely he ought to be man enough to shield her from herself, and from the sin and its consequences that her devotion would bring upon her.

It was so sweet to think of having her by his side through life, that the battle was a hard one ; but George's good angel won the victory, and though he knew what a blank his life would be from henceforth, he decided to save Beryl in spite of herself, and he felt more at peace than he had done since he had received Miss Ansell's letter in Ceylon, which overshadowed him with the cloud of the terrible mystery which had since come to light.

George had a long confidential talk with his father, and the upshot of it was, that George was to go away without anybody knowing where, except his father, and Beryl was still to be called "Mrs. George," and was to remain with her child as a daughter, under the doctor's roof. This would shield her from any remarks that might otherwise be made by good-natured Mrs. Grundy.

By this arrangement Beryl would not be lonely, and would be safe from all harm.

So George was content to go and bear the burden alone. He was now strong enough to be out and about. He had retained his little bachelor room in which he had slept in his childhood, while Beryl and her boy occupied grander quarters; but she used to run to his door, clad in her pale blue dressing-gown, to inquire for him every morning directly she got up.

On the morning after the above-named conversation between father and son, there was no response to her knock, no answer to her loving words.

"Was he asleep? was he ill? was he dead?" she asked herself, while a great trembling seized her limbs, and her tongue was silent from fear. He always locked the door, so she could not get in; and then she turned the handle, and to her surprise it opened.

With dread she glanced into the room, and spoke—still no answer, no sound. She crept on with uncertain wavering steps, but still no sign of life. She turned to look at the bed with a chill horror, and saw with a sense of relief that he was

not there. Where was he? She supposed that he must be up and gone down; perhaps she was late—had overslept herself.

Dear George! she would lay her head on his pillow just where he had lain, and a smile of love took a quick flight across her pale face—pale and delicate and pure as an early snowdrop—but it did not last long. She saw, while a spasm of apprehensive fear contracted her heart, that the bed had not been slept in, that drawers were open, clothes evidently selected from, while others were left in untidy heaps; all the débris was there which a man always leaves in packing up. It came upon her painfully and slowly, as she looked round the disordered room, that George was gone!

Gone! gone where? Gone from her! and the blankness of despair settled down upon her as she repeated that one word which to her meant so much—Gone!

And there they found her listlessly sitting on the ground, while her bright head rested on some of the clothes George had left.

Her large eyes had grown hollow and weary, even in that short time, and as she lifted her face she only repeated "Gone!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEAD !

WHEN George Grafton left his father's house it was with an aching void in his heart. Conscience told him he was right to go away, but his heart clung to Beryl and his boy, and the struggle to leave them was indeed a hard one. The old affection for Kate too was still in his heart, but he knew now he would not reinstate her as his wife if he could, and he was almost distracted with conflicting emotions. Who, after all, could have blamed him if he had taken his little Beryl again into his bosom, and carried her back to her happy home in the bright island of Ceylon? Who, indeed—George knew who, and went upon his way. Will he lose his reward?

George Grafton went to London, and then took chambers, and began business again. He worked hard, and succeeded in all he undertook. Miss Ansell wrote to him from time to time, with accounts of Kate. She had become very weak and delicate, but seemed to be fast regaining her reason.

She had begged Miss Ansell most earnestly to tell her the whole story of the mystery in which she found herself enveloped, but that good woman would tell her nothing till she had written to ask George's permission, which he gave, and then at last Kate knew all—knew that she had never legally been Harry Cartland's wife—knew that the man she had loved so madly and so blindly had deceived her, had sacrificed her to his ungovernable passion ; and her heart yearned towards her noble-minded George, with the sickening knowledge which had come too late to her, how far better *he* would have loved and cared for her if she had but bestowed on him one-tenth of the devotion she had given to Harry Cartland. She might still have been a happy honoured wife, while now—and she shuddered to think of the present.

She thought of George and of his goodness, and learnt to love him with a perfect love, made up of respect, affection, and earnest repentance—such a love as she might offer to her God. Very different from the passion-tossed insane love she had given the man who had ruined her.

Her heart still beat wildly when she thought of him. She would never curse him for his treachery,

but she, a dying woman, now gave her new-born purer love to the husband she had wronged and lost. She had never tired of talking of him to her aunt, and of the Beryl to whom he had transferred the treasure which in her blindness she had thrown from her.

She thought of her rival with no enmity. Kate, with all her faults, was a noble woman still. Her greatest wish was that Beryl should make her husband happy when she was gone—gone, perhaps, to join the man for whom she had sacrificed all, and who she could now see had been far from perfect, although she had set him up as an idol; and in her ignorance how she had worshipped him !

Thus in her last days Kate saw her sin, and repented of it to her God and found peace ; but of George she had as yet asked no forgiveness, nor of Beryl, whom she had, though unknowingly, injured so deeply.

Her anxiety upon this point hurried her onward to the grave already yawning for her.

One Sunday, looking in her doctor's kindly face, she begged to know the truth, how long she had to live ; and he had broken to her gently that the next Lord's Day she would spend with *Him* ;

and weary, world-worn Kate heard him with a smile. Peace at last! peace after all the sin, all the sorrow, all the suffering! Peace—peace for her!

But Kate, unforgiven Kate, could find no rest. She had not asked and received forgiveness of the husband she had injured, nor of innocent Beryl. With much heart-sickness she confided her trouble to Miss Ansell, and she, ever ready to do her duty, and much softened since first we met her, set off at once to see Beryl, then George.

When Beryl first realised that George for conscience' sake had forsaken her, it nearly broke her heart; but George's son was still at hand to take her out of herself. *He* must not see her cry—baby George's mother must find a smile for George's boy. Thus Beryl—broken-hearted Beryl—learnt to smile again.

Many months had passed since George had left her. The Old Year King had passed away and given up his sceptre to his successor, who was in full swing of Nature's brightest time—youth!

Spring had come for Beryl as for all the world—a time of cheering sounds, sweet fresh scents, and

brightest tints ; and though she was still very sad, she gladdened under the influence of the joyous season. Still she had not heard once from George. The one and only letter she had ever received from him was worn from constant reading. She kept it in her bosom, and when alone she would read it again and yet again. How happy it had made her ; how she had danced for joy, and told her glad news to her unconscious babe upon her knee, to the very walls, tables, and chairs ; and still she read the promise that he would come, and tried to fancy it was yet to be fulfilled, and so took comfort.

Miss Ansell reached Worham and had an interview with Beryl. She had not seen her before, and was much taken with her gentle and retiring manner. She was no "Girl of the Period," as the good woman remarked, but one who even our much-lauded grandmothers might have been proud of—and so they might indeed.

When Beryl heard of Kate's wish for forgiveness, and that her end was so near, she begged to be allowed to go to her at once, that she might cheer the last hours of the poor soul who had sinned, sorrowed, and suffered. Beryl was not one to "pass by on the other side." So this sweet little

Samaritan set off on her errand of mercy without delay, while Miss Ansell went on to London to seek George. To Beryl it was a trial to leave her boy; but ever thinking of others, she would not take him, lest it should bring a pang of sorrow to the childless woman to see her bonny boy, George's little son; and with tender heart she told herself Kate's life might have been different if she had been so blessed, knowing what her child had been to her in her time of trial. Kate's had come and found her all alone, no husband's strong hand to hold her back as she slid almost imperceptibly downhill.

With such gentle thoughts little Beryl reached Maidenhead and Miss Ansell's trim cottage, made brighter for poor Kate than it had ever been before through the spinster's long life.

Kate was lying on a couch beside the window, dressed in her favourite white, relieved with crimson, looking wondrous handsome with the sun's rays playing about her. Her clear white skin was lit up by a hectic flush on either cheek, and her dark eyes were bright, and looked unnaturally large.

To Beryl's tap there was a faint "Come in," and George's two wives met.

Each looked at the other earnestly, but although Kate saw the fairylike little creature before her, and gazed upon her as a lovely vision too bright for a being of this world, she did so with admiration and pleasure, never for a moment dreaming who her visitor was. While Beryl, face to face with George's legal wife, advanced with trembling hesitating steps, wondering no longer that he had so loved this woman—glorious even still with Death's dark hand upon her.

"Kate," she said timidly, "I have come to nurse you. Will you have me?"

The sick woman smiled happily.

"Who would refuse so good an offer? Where have you come from, child? Earth or heaven?"

"I have come from Worham, Kate," said Beryl.

A shadow crossed Kate's face.

"From Worham! I too have been there, the name reminds me of a sad past. My parents were both killed there, little fairy."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" said Beryl nervously; "I ought to have known."

"Known, how should you know, child? You lovely little creature, I wonder if ever you will suffer too—suffer, ay, and sin?"

Beryl took a chair beside the couch, and sat down.

"You seem to think I am a child," she said sadly; "but I am not. I am not many years younger than yourself; and as for suffering, I have suffered too: like yourself, I lost both my parents together—they were drowned. I thought then every other grief through life must be small to me after that; but I have felt my other trial even more than that. So you see, Kate, I have suffered too. As for sin," a hot blush dyeing her snowy cheek—"I *wished* to sin, and should have done so, but for the self-denial of a noble man!"

Kate was watching her varying colour.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come, dear fairy! You seem to bring a purer atmosphere with you. And may I tell you my sad story?"

"I know it," said Beryl; "that is why I came. I thought I might be able to comfort you."

"You know it!" cried Kate. "How?"

"Miss Ansell told me," answered Beryl.

"My aunt! I thought she was too kind to talk

about me," said Kate sadly; "but never mind, tell me about the noble-hearted man who saved you. Did you love him, fairy?"

"Yes, yes, indeed I did?"

"*Who was he?*" cried Kate, the hectic spots deepening on her thin cheeks.

"He was your husband," said Beryl simply; "George Grafton!"

"And you are——?" gasped Kate.

"I am Beryl," she answered gently.

Kate hid her face in her hands. It had been a shock to her to find this beautiful childlike creature was her successor. A spasm of almost jealousy contracted her heart, and left her white, deathly white; but her true nature soon reasserted itself, and she was able to see how good, unselfish, and perfect a woman this girl must be who could put her own feelings aside and come to her, who had been the first cause of her great affliction.

At last Kate emerged from her hand's imprisonment, pale and calm.

"Beryl—may I call you Beryl?—you are an angel, and God will reward you for your goodness by the best reward you can have on earth, a good man's love. As for George," she cried, with excitement,

"he is a king among men ; where could you find his fellow ? I tell you, child, nowhere. I threw the treasure of his love from me. I gave up reality for a shadow ; but oh Beryl, it was such a bright shadow ; and I did love Harry with such a passionate love—a love that such a gentle nature as yours would not comprehend, Beryl."

"And yet," she answered, her face rosy red with proud shame—"and yet I offered to stay with George, after I knew I was not his wife."

"You did ?" cried Kate—and crimson Beryl nodded an affirmative. "Then you are but a woman, after all, like myself," said Kate, with a sigh and a smile ; "and I thought George had secured an angel for his second wife."

"I am not his wife," answered the girl, with trembling lips.

Kate took her into her arms and kissed her.

"Poor child ! poor child ! how you have suffered ; but it won't be for long now, dear ; only a few short days, and George will be free—free to make you all his own, Beryl, and then you will be so happy, it will make up for past sorrow ;" and the fair face brightened at her words.

"You think he will come back, Kate?" she asked.

"I know it," Kate answered; and the two wives were silent.

Kate was the first to break the silence.

"I am so glad you came to me, Beryl. I wanted so much to know you. Forgive me for injuring you, though it was unknowingly."

"I do not see what I have to forgive *you*, Kate. It was Dr. Cartland who brought about this sin and trouble."

"Spare me, Beryl—spare me!" cried the woman in an agony; "I cannot hear a word against him—of course I know. I know he deserves all that you could say against him; but remember I not only loved him, but I believed in him; and you will know the pain it is to me."

"Poor girl!" answered Beryl softly, patting the thin hand which she held in hers, "I do understand. I can feel for you. If George were bad, I should love him, and it would be agony to be reminded of it."

"You forgive me, Beryl?"

"Yes."

"Will you ask George to forgive me too?"

"I do not know where he is, Kate;" and tears trembled on her long lashes.

"He will soon come to you now," said Kate. "Ask him to forgive me when I am gone," she added faintly.

Miss Ansell returned that night with a disappointed air.

She had failed to find George Grafton; he was away from town on business.

She had left a letter at his chambers for him; but he might, she felt, return too late, too late, to forgive Kate.

In the meantime Beryl remained with Kate, brightening her last hours with her love and kindness; bathing the fevered brow; smoothing the bright dark hair with gentle hand; cheering the drooping spirit; wiping the death-damps from her brow.

A deep affection sprang up between these two young women.

Kate often suffered acutely, and Beryl ministered to her lovingly.

The Lord's Day had come round again.

Still Kate was lingering; the church-bells were chiming their invite to the Christian to come and

hear of Christ. The bells had rung their changes one by one, and now the last gave forth its note—four bells with a warning sound—one, two, three, four ! one, two, three, four ! ding, dong, ding, dong. You'll be too late ; you'll be too late ; you'll be too late.

"Do the bells seem to talk to *you*, Beryl ? they do to me," said Kate's faint and altered voice. "It is very hard to breathe to-day. You'll be too late ; you'll be too late. I wish the bells would say something else, Beryl. Can't you find me fresh words to that old tune, dear ?"

"Yes," said Beryl, "many words, Kate—Christ loved the world, Christ loved the world, will go to it."

Kate was lying on her couch by the window, in a loose white wrapper, with still a crimson flower at her breast, pinned there by Beryl (for Kate the dying loved flowers yet), and Beryl was perched beside her, pillowing the dark head upon her breast, her shining hair mingling with Kate's raven locks, and the two were a perfect picture to look at.

So thought an unseen observer who, finding the door ajar, had peeped in, and now stood with

a wildly beating heart waiting, trying to regain calmness before he entered the room.

George Grafton—for it was he—never forgot that sight! *His two wives!* the two women whom he had loved, ay, and still loved so fondly, clasped in each other's arms.

I suppose it never occurred to any man before to fall upon such a picture under the like circumstances. It was agony and pleasure combined, and his feelings were impossible to describe.

As he advanced into the room they both looked up, both uttered a faint cry, but it was Kate who spoke.

George gazed at the two beautiful faces—both so perfect in their own style—the faces he had loved so well.

“George, forgive me!” and Beryl made way for him, and kept to the other side of Kate's armless couch.

George knelt down beside his dying wife.

Yes! of the two, *she* was his legal wife; her eyes were fixed eagerly on his, awaiting his reply, while hot tears ran races down Beryl's fair cheeks.

George took her hands in his; he did not find it very easy to speak, but words came at last.

"Kate, my wife, I forgive you as I hope to be forgiven!"

She smiled.

"And now a harder test still, George—can you forgive *him*?"

A pause.

"I forgive him, Kate!"—then silence, broken by Beryl's sobs.

"George," went on the dying woman, "hold me up, I want to speak!" and he supported her with his left arm, while with his right he clasped her clay-cold hand.

She smiled, a contented, happy smile.

"I am glad to rest here once more, George. Beryl has been so good to me, you will repay her, dear."

No reply.

"George, don't wait another day after I am put underground. I charge you not to let any delicacy of feeling for me prevent your atoning for the suffering she has met with through me. Be good to her, George. She is an angel; may God bless you and your little Beryl! I love her as dearly as if she were my sister! *Promise, George.*"

"I promise, dear" (with a choking sob).

Kate smiled gloriously.

"Will you kiss me?"

He stooped over her.

"George," she whispered, "I know, now that it is too late, I love you—*you* and not another."

Their lips met fondly for the last time. It was the first and last kiss of *love* Kate had ever given her husband.

Weeping Beryl clung to and kissed the dying hand.

Kate looked from one to the other, and placed Beryl's little hand in George's.

"The bells were wrong, fairy! it was not too late. I am so happy. God bless you both!"

So Kate passed away, and left them hand in hand. She had been the only barrier between them.

She was dead!

CHAPTER XIX.

CONCLUSION.

GEORGE GRAFTON kept his promise, and the day after Kate was laid to rest, he took Beryl home to himself, having legally made her his wife. Very few people ever knew of the mystery which had so overshadowed his life, threatening to engulf it in blackest ruin and misery, and those few loved George and kept his secret. So no finger was pointed at George and his wife as a "couple with a history." They were very happy these two, with the happiness of perfect love, respect, and confidence. How different would it have been for George, if, looking in Beryl's childish face, he had had to reproach himself with having tarnished her innocence; but he had no such thing to blame himself for, and he was utterly and completely happy, contented, and thankful.

Beryl no longer shunned Kate's name, and she was often talked about by them with hushed voice, as one talks of the beloved dead. There was no sanctum in George's heart *now* where Beryl was shut out, for she too had loved Kate, and thus

could think of her while they sat, hand locked in hand, and hearts beating in true response.

George did not go back to Ceylon, nor to business. He and Beryl both loved country life ; and they shared it together, living together in the lovely county of Monmouth, so dear with historical recollections, beautiful with its wealth of soft sweet scenery and distant blue Welsh mountains, and silvery winding rivers. Not far from the revered old walls of Tintern Abbey, not far from the Wynd Cliff with its dreamy view of vapoury distance, taking in so many counties, where the river winds so brightly among the dark foliage of the trees. Not far from all these lovely gifts of God's own making lived Beryl and George.

Baby George was baby George no longer ; but a sturdy little three-year-old, and that rosy small bundle of white garments sitting on the lawn at Beryl's feet, is little Kate, aged six months. It had been Beryl's proposition to name her so, and George had kissed his wife, and thanked her for her kind thought ; so the baby was christened Kate.

What more can be said about them ? Except that they were as good as they were happy. No

one in trouble, suffering, or sin, ever sought their aid in vain. Would that there were more like them! Surely all must leave them with regret!

Sydney Saunders is too good a fellow to be left out in the cold. He and George were friends, fast friends, and of course he went down to Silverbeach, where George and Beryl had built their nest; and the time being February, and all the feathered tribe "pairing," Sydney felt bound to follow in the fashion; and Laura Grafton being by his side, why of course he proposed to her.

Poor Charles Summers never loved again; but as long as he lives little Beryl will reign in his honest heart.

Kate is done with, the last page of her history closed; still one line must be written as an epitaph to her memory. With all her faults she was a queen among women. May God rest her soul!

The elder Graftons are still at Worham, sailing down life's stream together, with some of their children yet around them.

Miss Ansell, you may be sure, is Miss Ansell still, and is likely to remain so; and no one has ever yet found out an instance of her having neglected her duty in any way. She will be a

hard old woman to the end ; but George's wife and George's children can gain smiles from her flinty lips. Yes, and she often smiles to herself with satisfaction as she remembers that Dr. Cartland never took her in. All along she had felt that he was a villain ; all along she had been certain that there was a *Mystery*.

THE END.

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